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Will War Come To India ?

Onions And Opinions

With K. A. Abbas

A Report To Gandhiji

Price Rs. 5/-

CHURCHILL'S BLIND-SPOT: INDIA

By

N. G. JOG

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INTRODUCTORY

"*TELL THE TRUTH TO INDIA!*"—was a favourite saying of the late Lord Birkenhead. Winston Churchill, too, has frequently quoted this dictum with lively appreciation.

I have followed the advice of these two distinguished Englishmen and tried in the following pages to tell the truth to India, as Churchill sees the truth about India. The plain, unvarnished truth. The hard, bitter truth.

I am sure freedom-loving people all over the world, who have seen a nation of 400 million people relegated to cold storage for the duration of the war (as Brendan Bracken, British Minister of Information, told Americans), will also be interested in hearing the Churchillian version of truth about India. They have long been baffled by the paradox of the world's most indomitable fighter against Fascism refusing to apply the Atlantic Charter to India and vowing to hold what he has!

It is an amazing fact that Winston Churchill's biographers pay scant attention to the Indian facet of his chequered career. They generally skip over his Indian record—some in hurry, some apologetically, some in the belief that it is of no interest or importance, some out of consideration for Churchill and some, maybe, out of sympathy for us! I have come across at least one 300-page life of Churchill, wherein the very word "India" is not mentioned!

The woof of India, nevertheless, is woven inextricably with the warp of Winston Churchill's career. As a subaltern he spent three years of his life in this country at the turn of the century. He wrote his first book upon India and in India. And ever since then, he has been echoing his father's command—how many persons know that Lord Randolph Chur-

chill was a Secretary of State for India ?—"to watch, develop and guard the land and the people of Hindostan, that most truly bright and precious gem in the crown of the Queen."

As a member of the British Cabinet, Winston Churchill had been associated both with the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 and the Montford Reforms of 1919, as also with the appointment of the abortive Simon Commission in 1927. Later on, when out of office, he constituted himself the leader of the opposition to the Macdonald-Baldwin scheme of reforms. He spent five long years of his life in conducting a raging, tearing campaign against the various constitutional inquiries and proposals, which finally bore fruit in the Government of India Act of 1935.

It was during this period that he made it plain as a pikestaff that "the British nation had no intention whatever of relinquishing its mission in India or of parting with its supreme control." He rubbed it in again and again that India could not hope to attain even Dominion Status in any period "which living men will see," or "which human beings ought to take into practical account."

And it was during the early thirties that Winston Churchill uttered the historic imprecation: "The truth is that Gandhi-ism *and all it stands for*[1] will, sooner or later, have to be grappled with and finally crushed." It is an imprecation which he has seemingly fulfilled with his own hands a decade later! For four and a half years now he is putting into practice all the diehard theories and drastic remedies which he preached and prescribed during the preceding forty years.

Churchill's Indian record thus forms a part of his career, which must not be glossed over or ignored. For nearly half a century, amidst all the shifting scenes of peace and

1 The italics of this and subsequent extracts in this book do not belong to the authors quoted: as a rule they are mine.--N. G. J.

war, of storm and stress, and in spite of his own frequent changes of parties and principles, he has steadfastly followed a certain policy on Indian affairs, which gives a coherence to his career which it otherwise singularly lacks.

This record must have a vital importance for Winston Churchill, though lately his life has been absorbed in more momentous issues. This is a record which has mattered most during the last four and a half years for the people of India, for one out of every five persons in the world. And this is a record which has a deep significance for the remaining four too. For, if Winston Churchill is a world figure today, India, too, is a world problem.

War has brought death and destruction all over the earth To us in India it has brought, in addition, what is known as the political deadlock. Indeed, that deadlock is the most pressing reality of the Indian situation. For five long years now, politicians in India have been searching for the key of the deadlock. They searched for it far and wide, high and low. In Whitehall and the Viceroy's House. At the Aga Khan's Palace in Poona and on Mount Pleasant Road in Bombay.

Some clever persons argued that the deadlock is not a singular but a plural phenomenon and that it must have a double or a treble key. They therefore ran from pillar to post, and from there to another pillar. A few political Sherlock Holmeses even peeped into the White House in Washington and the Generalissimo's dugout in Chungking for that open sesame. Since his release, Mahatma Gandhi himself has begun a-hunting for the key of the deadlock with his usual single-minded devotion.

Where is that elusive key ?

Long ago Lord Beaconsfield said : "The key of India is London ; the majesty of sovereignty, the spirit and vigour of your Parliament, the inexhaustible resources, the

ingenuity and determination of your people—*these are the keys of India!*" Incidentally, this quotation forms a revealing frontispiece of Churchill's collection of speeches on India.

If the key of India is London, the key of the Indian deadlock is Winston Churchill; the majesty of his authority, the spirit and vigour with which he has guarded for a life-time the brightest jewel in the British crown, the ingenuity and determination with which he has stuck to his blind-spot—*these are the keys of the Indian deadlock.*

The British Prime Minister stands head and shoulders above the members of his Cabinet; he dominates them by sheer force of personality. As discerning a person as Lloyd George remarked during a famous debate in the Commons that there were too many Yes-men about the Premier. Sir Keith Murdoch expressed similar views in a letter to *The Times*: "Churchill has such great powers that he dominates much too greatly those around him. This has virtue, but it also has the unhappy effect of giving undue reach to a mind, which is capable of mis-judgment as well as good judgment."

"The Prime Minister talks so well," wrote Harold Laski in the *New Statesman And Nation*, "that his colleagues listen where they should speak. He improvises profound convictions so brilliantly that they are stricken into silence by the desire to entrust to their memories what they ought to drive him to defend." Again, "He is far too prone to mistake acceptance of his own views for an understanding of the issue. If a colleague is critical of Mr. Nehru's attitude, Mr. Churchill assumes that he has mastered the problem of India."

Here in India our eyes are focused upon the Viceroy's House and Whitehall. Figures like Amery and Cripps, Linlithgow and Wavell, Maxwell and Mudie, not to mention the umpteen "patriotic and wise men" of the Governor-

General's Executive Council flit in the gloaming of the deadlock with an air of self-conscious superiority. In India and even in Britain, there has long been a public agitation for the retirement of Amery. There was a similar clamour against Lord Linlithgow at the fag-end of his Viceroyalty. Linlithgow has gone and Wavell has come, but the deadlock still abides with us—only doubly locked!

Publicists and politicians in India no longer protest against the Linlithgow legacy. They have even resigned themselves to accept Amery for the duration. But they have become mightily critical and even apprehensive about what is known as the Wavell Plan. The fiat has gone forth that the task which faces the new Viceroy is not so much political as economic. In order to divert attention from the refrigerator in which political issues are kept, economic problems are being pushed into the hot-house.

Lord Wavell's Government has decided that its first duty is to raise the standard of living of the masses and to improve their health. Agriculture must be developed and the peasantry must be made prosperous, *vide* the Rs. 1,000 Crore Agricultural Plan. The industries of India must be developed and a new deal given to workers. A net-work of roads and railways and canals and aerodromes must be spread all over the country. There are plans for forests and fisheries, education and electricity. And, of course, for all this, British guidance, British experts, British machinery, and blocked British currency, if not British rule, are a *sine qua non*. It is planning, planning all the way—away from freedom!

Mahatma Gandhi confessed to be amazed by the new shift in British policy as revealed in the debate on India in the Commons on July 28, 1944. "To me," he said, "it looks like putting the cart before the horse. I have not yet seen any horse performing the trick of pushing the cart with

its nose." Even Mr. J. R. D. Tata, the head of the House of Tatas and one of the principal authors of the Rs. 10,000 Crore Bombay Plan, protested against this subtle attempt to bypass the political issue, and categorically declared: "I regard the issue of Indian independence as one overwhelming all others."

Now the most important thing about the Wavell Plan is that Lord Wavell himself is part and parcel of the Churchill Deal for India. It was the boast of Napoleon that he picked up common soldiers and made Marshals out of them. In 1943 Churchill dumbfounded the world by seizing a Field Marshal on active service and putting him into a frock-coat. The "Wizard of the Western Desert" was overnight enthroned the Grand Moghul of New Delhi—a wizardry which only a Winston Churchill could be capable of. "Wavell has landed a plum which was beyond the avid reach of even the great Kitchener, but is it a promotion or a demotion?"—tongues wagged in messes and drawing-rooms.

It was neither. Churchill was too shrewd to waste a first-rate general on a second-rate job. In his eyes India was not merely a base from which is to be won the war against Japan. India herself was a major front. India must be herself won anew and held for Britain—if possible, a peaceful, prosperous, contented India. "Guinea-a-word" Wavell was the ideal choice for the Indian assignment. Politically speaking, he had neither a past to which he was committed nor a future to care for. He was trained to obey, as well as to command.

As a biographer of Lord Allenby, he was conversant with the issues that would face Britain after the war. He knew India at first-hand, having taken a prominent part in the Cripps negotiations. He would make India militarily safe and politically secure, even as Lord Allenby made Egypt after World War I. And, above all, with his military

traditions and reputed taciturnity, he would keep what Churchill called "the unpractised, unrepresentative, self-chosen groups of Indian politicians" at an arm's length. After a little apprenticeship with Amery, he could be trusted to govern India, as Churchill wanted India to be governed.

Wavell as Viceroy is thus more of a fulfilment than a promise. The Wavell Plan is itself only the Churchill Deal in action, as the reader of this book will presently find for himself. Passages after passages can be quoted from Churchill's speeches in the thirties, which have a direct bearing on the developments that are taking place before our eyes in the forties, though Churchill himself has always remained in the background, as far as India is concerned, since he became Premier. Listen to this :

"We have a supreme moral duty to discharge to the Indian people. We have no right whatever to hand them over to a comparatively small and utterly unrepresentative political faction, to be the prey of misgovernment, of deterioration in every public service, of a religious bigotry of a kind not dreamed of for generations in the West, and finally of civil war."[1]

And this : "The question at stake is not therefore the gratification of the political aspirations towards self-government of a small number of intellectuals. It is, on the contrary, the practical, technical task of maintaining the peace and life of India by artificial means upon a much higher standard than would otherwise be possible."[2]

Again, "The apparatus of Government in India is incomparably more important to the masses than political change."[3]

And, finally : "Such a vast helpless mass requires extra British guidance, higher efficiency of Government, more British civil servants and a stricter and more vigorous administration in all technical matters."[4]

1 *Infra* p. 65 2 *Infra* p. 66 3 *Infra* p. 193 4 *Infra* p. 195

The keys of the Indian deadlock are thus neither with Wavell nor Amery, not even with Gandhi and Jinnah, or Savarkar and Ambedkar, but with Winston Churchill. The destinies of 400 million people are being decided for more than four years now in the private study of Winston Churchill. And across the portals of 10, Downing Street seem to be inscribed the words addressed to India: *All hope abandon ye, who enter here!*

This is a tragic, a terrible thing to have to say, but this will be the verdict of history on Churchill's trusteeship of what he called in 1897 "those great estates beyond the sea" —India! There is an overwhelming consensus of informed opinion that Churchill has been the real stumbling block in the path of India's freedom. As early as August 1940 (i.e. within four months of his becoming Premier), Edward Thompson noted that "It is widely believed that both the Viceroy and Mr. Amery wanted to go much further."[1]

Many months later, John T. Whitaker gave the following graphic account of a Cabinet meeting: "A group in the Cabinet decided to flush his (Churchill's) hand and force immediate action. As one of the men in that session later expressed it, 'Mr. Amery had finished his suggestion that we should promise India Dominion Status at a fixed period after the defeat of Hitler. Other members of the Government were prepared to support his initiative. Before they could speak, Mr. Churchill let out a roar like a wounded lion. The room was cleared as swiftly as if there had been a lion among us in very truth. As yet the subject has not been raised again'."[2]

The story itself may be a apocryphal, but its substance has certainly the authentic ring of truth about it—of the Churchillian truth. At any rate, the following extract from

1 *Enlist India For Freedom!*
2 *We Cannot Escape History!*

the preliminary report of the Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations, held in Quebec in December 1942, is explicit and authoritative : "Many members felt there was urgent need for a new British Government statement, preferably by Mr. Churchill, clarifying the application of the Atlantic Charter to India. Without this there will remain serious suspicions among the United Nations—the Chinese and Americans especially—about the sincerity of the British promises. It was felt by certain American and Canadian members that Mr. Churchill's attitude was a much more serious obstacle to improvement in the psychological situation than Mr. Amery's, though the latter has acquired a symbolic (if not wholly deserved) significance in the eyes of many people as typifying the old diehard imperialist spirit."

How serious the suspicion about the sincerity of British promises to India is, was strikingly revealed by *l'affaire Phillips*, which broke out like a rash in three continents in September 1944. The Personal Representative of President Roosevelt in India had not the least hesitation in holding Churchill directly responsible for the bitterness of Indian feeling. He urged that Britain should make a solemn declaration of Indian independence at a specific date in order to placate India, reassure China and also in order to convince the colonial people conquered by the Japanese that they have something better to look forward to than return to their old masters.

Winston Churchill's blind-spot has thus become not merely the blind alley of 400 million people, but a major international sore-spot. As Pearl Buck said: "India has become an immediate test case for world democracy in the eyes of all darker peoples everywhere. At this moment freedom can be declared only in India. Millions in China, in South America, in North America, in the

isles of the oceans, in Africa and even in Europe are watching to see if democracy means what it says, and if the four freedoms are true or false. By what we do about India, democracy will stand or fall."

The blind-spot, therefore, needed to be dissected, analysed and illumined for the scrutiny of India, of the world and of Winston Churchill himself. I count myself among his more fervent admirers. He is undoubtedly a great figure of modern times. Only one man in the whole world could have stood four-square—"if necessary alone, but not for ourselves alone"—against the engulfing tide of Facism in June 1940. Only one man could have held the torch of freedom aloft in that darkest hour of humanity. That man was Winston Churchill.

Alas! That torch cannot shed its effulgent light upon the Indian landscape. Churchill has proved, however, that he can seize the majestic impulse of a moment and transcend his own limitations and blind-spots. On the fateful day of Hitler's invasion of Russia, he denied in a flash all his past, and thus laid the firm foundations of his own future—not merely of his own, but of Britain's, of Russia's, of freedom's itself.

It was a climacteric of history. It was also a climacteric in Churchill's own life. For, if he had even a bigger blind-spot than India, it was Soviet Russia. He had likened Lenin to a plague bacillus, but has lived to become the loyal comrade-in-arms of Stalin, Lenin's successor.

That transformation helped Churchill to win the war. A similar consummation in the case of India can alone win him the peace.

CHAPTER I

A HUSSAR IN A HURRY

IT is a matter of some interest to the psycho-analyst, if not to the historian, that Churchill's first contact with India brought him a dislocated shoulder.

It was the fag-end of monsoon in 1896 when the troopship carrying Lieutenant Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, of the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, and 1200 men touched Bombay. Disembarkation is always a tiresome process and Bombay did not then boast of the excellent facilities of the Ballard Pier or the stately though unbusiness-like Gateway of India. Passengers had to resort to the squalid approaches of the Sassoon Dock and the ship was scheduled to land there late in the evening. So anxious were Churchill and his fellow officers, however, to see what India was like, that in the afternoon they hailed one of those tiny boats which eternally bob in the Bombay harbour and decided to explore the mysteries of the East on their own.

The sea was rough and the last lap of the voyage from Southampton was proving somewhat perilous for the Hussars. Leaping from the frisky boats on to the slippery steps of the quay requires considerable agility and an amount of luck. Hardly had the boat come alongside the pier when Churchill wildly clutched at an iron ring ; but before he could get a foothold, the boat had swung away giving his right shoulder "a sharp and peculiar wrench He scrambled up as best he could and no wonder his remarks on gaining *terra firma* were mostly confined "to the earlier letters of the alphabet !"

It was not a happy introduction either for Churchill or for India. "I had sustained an injury," says Churchill.

" which was to last me my life, which was to cripple me at polo, to prevent me from ever playing tennis, and to be a grave embarrassment in moments of peril, violence and effort. Since then, at irregular intervals my shoulder has dislocated on the most unexpected pretexts."[1] And on the part of India, one may add, the Churchillian expletives in the earlier letters of the alphabet seem to be still ringing in her ears.

The mishap nevertheless had its saving grace. The dislocated shoulder compelled Churchill to use a modest Mauser pistol instead of flourishing the more martial sword in his fighting days on the North-West Frontier and later on in Africa, particularly when he took part in the famous cavalry charge at Omdurman. This undoubtedly helped him to emerge unscathed through his numerous skirmishes in the next four years. And the ever present apprehension that his shoulder might go out has kept the memory of India green in his mind.

Bangalore was the destination of the 4th Hussars. *En route*, Churchill spent a day at Poonah (which sported its 'h' then,) where he picked up his "cabinet" of menials, entered into serious negotiations for a string of polo ponies and over "a banquet of glitter, pomp and iced champagne" at the Government House, gave Lord Sandhurst, his slightly startled host, the benefit of his counsel on various Indo-British affairs. Within forty-eight hours of his setting foot on Indian soil he had thus felt "the keenest realization of the great work which England was doing in India and of her high mission to rule these primitive but agreeable races for their welfare and our own."[2]

No. 46, Trinity Road, Bangalore, which became the home and headquarters of Churchill for the next three years, still remains very much as it was forty-eight years ago, though the

1 *My Early Life* p. 116 2 *Ibid.* p. 118

glory of its then extensive grounds with their purple bougainvillaea and splendid roses has departed with time. The three young subalterns who clubbed there were without a care in the world. The climate of Bangalore is reputedly salubrious and the cantonment leaves nothing to be desired in the amenities of life for the British officers who are lucky to be garrisoned there. "Princes could live no better than we," says Churchill. "Snipe (and snakes) abound in the marshes; brilliant butterflies dance in the sunshine, and nautch-girls by the light of the moon."[1]

Polo was the central theme of this idyllic existence. It was a sport at which Churchill excelled and to which he devoted all his evenings and most of his fortune. So assiduously did the 4th Hussars follow the game, that within fifty days of landing in India they won the Golconda Cup at Hyderabad—a record which remains unbroken to this day. And the crowning triumph of Churchill's career came when he helped to win the Meerut Inter-Regimental Tournament—the blue riband of Indian polo—in 1899 though he had to play all through with his elbow strapped tight to his side, thanks to the shoulder which had again dislocated just on the eve of the Tournament!

The three Ps.—parade in the morning, polo with its variations in the evening, and (chota) pegs in between—generally absorb the entire existence of British military officers in India. The cantonments in which they are quartered are geographically situated in India but they form a world of their own, which is neither British, nor Indian, nor even Anglo-Indian. It is as if they lived on a different planet which was modelled exactly to their own specifications. The Indians with whom they come in contact are meant solely to minister to their wants—theirs and those of their ponies. The ponies cost a lot of money for which one has

1 *Ibid.* p. 119

occasionally to resort to the obsequious but rapacious money-lenders who haunt the British garrisons. One has then got to be polite even to an Indian !

Except for such serpents in Eden, the other Indians with whom the British officer comes in contact are in his eyes generally the models of virtue—as slaves ! There is the barber who shaves you adroitly while you are still lying half asleep in your bed; the bearer who puts you in your well-pressed uniform; the butler who has your *chota hazri* ready on the tick of time; and the syce who is holding the well-groomed pony for the *Huzoor* to ride to the parade ground.

Of such a world has Rudyard Kipling sung the glories and perpetuated the pattern, and in such a world did Churchill spend three most impressionable years of his life. He flung himself into it with his youthful zest and gusto. In his own words the East was then " the gateway to the adventures and conquests of England " and Churchill had his full fill of both. India was to him a magnified Blenheim Park, the ancestral seat of the Marlboroughs, where he was born. Nothing was without bounds or beyond his reach. To his own well-known qualities of push and persuasiveness were added the efforts of his mother in London. She left " no wire unpulled, no stone unturned, no cutlet uncooked " to get Winston the most coveted billet—the most coveted in his case being where fighting was at its thickest !

While his fellow-subalterns were doing the monotonous rounds in Bangalore, Churchill thus enjoyed various military jaunts on his own. The very next year after his arrival in India he got himself attached to the Malakand Field Force and drew his first blood on the Frontier and wrote his first book. Subsequently he pulled off a staff appointment with the Tirha Expeditionary Force, while he was actually on French leave from his regiment. But the biggest fish he

landed was when he wangled a job with the British Army in Egypt on the eve of its campaign against the Dervish Army in spite of the unconcealed opposition of its Commander-in-Chief, the great Kitchener himself. And this too after the recomendation of none less than the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, had been turned down! No wonder his activities roused the jealousy of his colleagues and even superiors who dubbed him a "Medal-hunter" and "Self-advertiser!"

Young Churchill must be excused if, between those twin occupations of playing polo and landing on the Empire's hot spots, he had precious little time to spare for India during his three years' stay in this country. His Indian acquaintances naturally did not extend beyond his household servants, the army sepoys and a few polo-playing princelings. And his Hindustani vocabulary — the medium of his conversation with such of them as could not speak even pidgin English — consisted exactly of two words[1]: *Chalo* (get on) and *Maro* (kill)!

No wonder then that Churchill did not know that an organisation called the Indian National Congress, which was founded by an Engiishman, was functioning for a dozen years when he came to India; or that it was already passing resolutions for establishing an Indian Military College for the sons of the soil and was protesting vigorously against the exorbitant price which India had to pay for the British garrisons. As early as 1891 it pointed out that while the German soldier cost Rs. 145, the French Rs. 185 and the English in England Rs. 285, immediately the last-named was despatched to India, his expenses shot up to Rs. 775 a year. This expenditure became all the more glaring when contrasted with the annual income per head in England of £42, in France £23, in Germany £18 — and in India £1!

1. *Ibid.* p. 163

Lt. Churchill's expansive mood after the Bombay Governor's banquet would not have lasted so long had he known that a famine had already begun to stalk this land in 1896 or could he have foreseen that within a year a still grander banquet was to cost another Lieutenant of the Queen his life at the hands of a gunman[1].

Deep political discontent had already bred in India the cult of terrorism. And by an odd coincidence the very year that Lt. Churchill came to this country, a young Indian barrister who was practising in Africa returned to his motherland for a brief visit. His name was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

CHAPTER II

DISCIPLE OF MACAULAY

THE life of Lieutenant Winston Churchill was no better or worse than the life of a hundred other Englishmen who donned the Queen's uniform in the Roaring Nineties and came out to India with their regiments. He was not exactly popular in the mess-room, what with his own push and the family connections unfailingly landing him all the plums of service. But he was No. 1 of his polo team and was indispensable to the 4th Hussars for winning the Meerut Trophy. In normal course, therefore, he would have taken all the service hurdles in his stride, risen to a Brigadier's or even a General's rank and passed the evening of his life in digging for victory and occasionally writing letters to the *Times* against the folly of surrendering the British Empire : *Begad Sir !*—

1 Lt. Ayerst and Mr. Rand were shot dead while returning from the Government House, Poona, on the night of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

An extraordinary and an altogether unmilitary thing happened, however, in young Churchill's life soon after his arrival in India. One night in Bangalore he was bitten by the bug of intellectual uplift. He was then twenty-two, a dashing cavalry officer well set up on the road to glory, and enjoying himself like a prince. The dreary days of Harrow, where he waged a valiant but unavailing fight against Latin declension, were left far behind and no longer did any irregular Greek verbs raise their ghastly apparitions on the parade ground. Reading and reading serious books at that was then as now a military heresy. It was going against the good conduct rules of the cantonment, if not against Field Regulations. It was simply not done.

The belated awakening of love has generally a devastating effect upon the victim. So it was with Churchill though it was the love of learning with which he was suddenly fired. He became envious of those young chaps fresh from the universities who affected an Oxford accent and talked over his head. True, Churchill told himself, he was commanding the Queen's soldiers and guarding the Empire, while those varsity bucks merely preened upon their bookish lore. Still he "began to feel myself wanting in even the vaguest knowledge about many large spheres of thought."[1] When he heard words like "ethics" or the "Socratic method" he felt completely bowled over. "Who was Socrates, anyhow?" he wondered.

And so the boy who was the despair of his teachers, and almost the sorrow of his father—Lord Randolph Churchill had solemnly warned him on the eve of his joining Sandhurst against becoming "a social wastrel"—suddenly plunged himself in his twenty-third year into the sea of learning. While his companions enjoyed their siesta in the afternoon or sat under the punkah swopping bawdy stories,

1 *My Early Life* p. 123

Winston diligently devoted himself to the wooing of the goddess of learning.

He browsed over the widest fields in his intellectual pursuit. Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", Macaulay's History and Essays, Plato's "Republic", Aristotle's "Politics", Darwin's "Origin of the Species", Malthus's "Theory of Population", Lecky's "Rise and Influence of Rationalism"—all these and many more he steadily devoured during the three years he was in India. These were no doubt heavy victuals to take on an almost empty stomach but his digestion does not seem to have suffered in the process. Churchill admits, however, that it was a curious education for two reasons, "Firstly, what I got, I bit; secondly because I had no one to tell me: *This is discredited.*"[1]

Bangalore, rather than Harrow or Sandhurst, can thus legitimately claim to have laid the foundations of the future greatness of Churchill. The mind of the soldier who had come

> *Somewhere east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,*
> *Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man*
> *can raise a thirst*

was growing out of his uniform. He had raised a thirst mainly for knowledge and he was busy quenching it with the help of the bulky parcels of books which his fond mother sent by every mail from London. His horizon began to extend beyond the parade ground.

During the first world war, when Churchill did a spell of active service following his resignation from the Admiralty, he seems to have been momentarily fired by visions of military glory. Lord Oxford has noted that his political career then appeared nothing to him in comparison with it.

1 *Ibid.* p. 127

In Bangalore, though he was a professional soldier following the footsteps of his illustrious forbear, the Great Duke of Marlborough, he seems to have been singularly free from any such martial ambitions. His adventurous spirit no doubt always led him to the nearest battle-field, but it was more for some spirited fun than because of "ancestral voices prophesying war."

The Indian reader will have noticed with some surprise that in the foregoing list of authors, there is not a single one who could give a young cavalry officer the least insight into the history of India. It would have been thought that a mind so voracious and penetrating as Churchill's would take some pains to study the country whose hospitality he enjoyed for three long years. But his education on India began with Macaulay's essays on Robert Clive and Warren Hastings—the founders of the British Empire in India—and ended with the "*Barrack-room Ballads*" and "*Departmental Ditties*" of Kipling, the Empire's most illustrious poet-laureate.

No introduction to India can be more unfortunate to a foreigner than the writings of Macaulay on Indian subjects. Sweeping denunciations of a people and monstrous distortions of historical happenings become the more dangerous when they are clothed in a scintillating style like his. The fatal charm of the essayist's narrative blinds the reader to his reeking prejudices and perversions, and the mischief is all the greater when it is a young and avid mind like Churchill's which is doing the reading. We can well see what impressions the young Lieutenant must have derived about the country in which he was living when he read that Indian culture and learning consisted of "medical doctrines that would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy that would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding in kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty

thousand years long and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter."

A single shelf of good European library, summed up Macaulay, was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ! Nowhere is Macaulay's fatal propensity to massacre a fact for the turn of a phrase more glaringly exhibited than in his essays on Clive and Hastings. They were the intellectual windows through which Churchill peeped at India's past, while immediately present around him were the dusky and obsequious men who walked straight out of Kipling's poems. Churchill thus knew India only as a quaint world crowded with Surajah Dowlahs and Meer Jaffers, Omichunds and Nuncomars, Gunga Dins and Boh Da Thones, with Black Holes and Pagoda Trees, with

Bloomin' idols made o' mud—
Wot they called the Great Gawd Budd.

For all one can see, it is how he knows her still ! He has left it on record that "I accepted all Macaulay wrote as gospel."[1] It was decades later when he planned his own *magnum opus* on Marlborough (whom Macaulay has not spared—much to the grief of his descendant) that he realised that this historian was "the prince of literary rogues." But by then it was too late to repair the mischief done so far as India was concerned. India had already become Churchill's blind-spot.

Paradoxical as it may appear, it was the pen rather than the sword, which served Churchill as the introduction to most of his active military assignments. A Lieutenant of the 4th Queen's Own Hussars stationed at Bangalore in the south had no business to involve himself in trouble on the remote North-West Frontier. Churchill, however, got himself attached to the Malakand Field Force, which was going

1 *Ibid.* p. 126

on one of those ever-recurring expeditions against the Frontier tribesmen, not as a regular combatant but as a war correspondent ! In those specious days an army officer could act as a war correspondent and even *vice versa* and Churchill's style would not therefore be cramped in the new role. On the contrary he had an opportunity to wield both pen and sword simultaneously.

His assiduous reading had given him confidence in the use of words, which he so long lacked, and his new-gained knowledge came in handy when he was commissioned as a correspondent of the *Pioneer*, Allahabad, and the *Daily Telegraph*, London. It is unnecessary to go into the details of the operations in which Churchill was engaged in a dual capacity. Suffice it to say that not only did Lieutenant Churchill prove an excellent war correspondent but he was also mentioned in despatches for his courage and resolution and for making himself " useful at a critical moment ".

The favourable reception accorded to his despatches from the front, which appeared anonymously as " From a young Officer," encouraged Churchill to build a book on their foundation. He devoted the closing months of 1897 to that task and it was published early next year. It was not the age of the typewriter and Mr. David Konar, the assistant who wrote in long hand the first draft of the book, is happily still living in Bangalore. Mr. Konar recalls Lt. Churchill as a quiet young man; " but he did work and Mr. Konar often worked with him until the early hours of the morning and they would start again before breakfast."[1]

It may be mentioned here that inspired by the success of his first book, Churchill also wrote a full-length novel on a Ruritanian theme during his stay in Bangalore. He found this " much quicker work than the accurate chronicle of facts." *Savrola* was first published as a serial in

1 Article in the *Sunday Statesman* of Calcutta.

Macmillan's Magazine and later went through a number of editions. Though this first and last essay in fiction-writing brought the author a tidy sum of money, he has "consistently urged my friends to abstain from reading it."[1]

CHAPTER III

THE BUDDING IMPERIALIST

"*THE Story of the Malakand Field Force : An Episode of Frontier War*" by Winston L. S. Churchill, Lieutenant, the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, is quite a substantial volume of 336 pages, considering the minor nature of the engagement Young Churchill naturally took his first war seriously and the book is a worthy forerunner of the five huge tomes of *World Crisis*, which give the Churchillian version of World War I. Uncharitable critics nicknamed the book " A Subaltern's Tips to Generals". Nor was Churchill less free with his advice to high civilian officers, for he has devoted the last chapter to a discussion of the Frontier Policy which is a sort of King Charles's Head in the Imperial Government.

Nevertheless the *Malakand Field Force* proved a phenomenal success. Reviewers vied with one another in its praise and the proud author received a letter of congratulations from the Prince of Wales himself. The Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, also invited Churchill to compliment him personally. Above everything else, the book had earned for the young author in a few months two years' pay as a subaltern ! "If this would pass muster," reflected the Knight of the Pen, "there was lots more where it came from, and I felt a new way of making a living and of asser-

1 *My Early Life* p. 169

ting myself, opening splendidly out before me."[1] There and then Churchill decided to chuck his job at the first opportunity and set up independently on his own in England.

There are few Churchill fans, let alone general readers, who care to peruse the *Malakand Field Force* to-day. Even his biographers seem to give it a wide berth. That is the fault neither of the author nor of the book but of the subject. Against the global dimensions of the two world wars, a scrimmage on the Frontier looks like a stable brawl. This does not detract in any way from the excellence of Churchill's first literary offspring. As a military narrative it is quite a competent piece of work over which the author had obviously taken considerable pains.

The shadows of Gibbon and Macaulay lie heavily over the pages of the *Malakand Field Force*. Passages after passages recall the sonorous sweep and philosophical reflections of the former and the brilliant antitheses and picturesque allusions of the latter. The surprise is not that the uneducated subaltern played the sedulous ape to those two masters, but that at the very first attempt he rolled off his periods with such consummate ease and fluency. Here is a description of the blood feuds of the Pathans :

"Tribe wars with tribe. The people of one valley fight with those of the next. And to the quarrels of communities are added the combats of individuals. Khan assails Khan, each supported by his retainers. Every tribesman has a blood feud with his neighbour. Every man's hand is against the other, and all against the stranger. Nor are these struggles conducted with the weapons which usually belong to the races of such development. To the ferocity of the Zulu are added the craft of the Redskin and the marksmanship of the Boer." [2]

1. *Ibid.* Page 170 2 *Malakand Field Force* pp. 4-5

Read again the following opening of a chapter revealingly titled "The Light of Asia" :

"Few spectacles in nature are so mournful, and sinister, as the implacable cruelty with which a wounded animal is pursued by its fellows. Perhaps it is due to a cold and bracing climate, perhaps to a Christian civilization, that the Western peoples of the world have to a great extent risen above these low original instincts. Among Europeans power provokes antagonism and weakness excites pity. All is different in the East. Beyond Suez the bent of men's mind is such that safety lies only in success and peace in prosperity. All desert the falling. All turn upon the fallen." [1]

Macaulay complete with his malice !

If the dashing style of the *Malakand Field Force* recalls Macaulay, the great essayist of the nineteenth century, its political asides anticipate Churchill, the great Imperialist of the twentieth century. And this is what gives the book such an extraordinary interest in the eyes of Indian readers. One would have expected an unschooled subaltern, with his passion for polo and such a proclivity to rush into every passing scrape, to leave politics severely alone. Military men have a proverbial contempt for politics and politicians.

Churchill was an exception. Though *Malakand Field Force* is a military history, it opens and ends with an imperialistic flourish and is freely interspersed with political *obiter dicta.* In the preface the author observes : "The impartial critic will at least admit that I have not insulted the British public by writing a party pamphlet on a great Imperial question."

He proceeds at the end of the first chapter to state his object in writing the book :

"These pages may serve to record the actions of brave and skilful men. They may throw a sidelight on the great

1 *Ibid.* p. 222

drama of frontier war. They may describe an episode in that ceaseless struggle for empire which seems to be the perpetual inheritance of our race. They may amuse an idle hour. But the ambition I shall associate with them is that in some measure, however small, they may stimulate that growing interest which the Imperial Democracy of England is beginning to take in those great estates that lie beyond the sea, of which they are the proprietors or the trustees."[1]

Though young, Churchill was conversant with all the tricks of Imperialism. Even then he knew the value of the ancient Roman maxim *Divide et Impera* (Divide and Rule). Talking about the Indian Army he felt it "comfortable to reflect" that both the Sikh and the Pathan were among the soldiers of the Queen: "The Sikh was originally invented to combat the Pathan. His religion was designed to be diametrically opposed to Mahommedanism. *It was a shrewd act of policy.* Fanaticism was met by fanaticism. Religious abhorrence was added to racial hatred."[2]

If the Sikh reader of those days must have been shocked by the soldier-author's interpretation of the faith that the great Nanak founded, the Pathan had still less reason to compliment himself. Churchill had not developed in those far-away days his love for the "great Muslim minority" (as a counterpoise to the Indian National Congress) and here is how he apostrophised Islam in his best Gibbonian manner:

"It was originally propagated by the sword, and ever since, its votaries have been subject, above the people of all other creeds, to this form of madness. In a moment the fruits of patient toil, the prospects of material prosperity, the fear of death itself, are flung aside. The more emotional Pathans are powerless to resist. All rational considerations are forgotten. Seizing their weapons, they become Ghazis—

1. *Ibid.* p. 14 2. *Ibid.* p. 279

as dangerous and as sensible as mad dogs: fit only to be treated as such!!"[1]

"Thus civilization is confronted with militant Mahommedanism. The forces of progress clash with those of reaction. The religion of blood and war is face to face with that of peace. Luckily the religion of peace is usually better armed."[2] Hardly could the author have foreseen that within two decades the European nations following "the religion of peace" were to indulge in an orgy of slaughter which sent eight million souls to kingdom come or that this record was still to be bettered by them in World War II.

Winston Churchill was a shrewd observer. His short experience of the frontier campaign made him quickly realise that when it comes to actual fighting, the Indian sepoy, whether Pathan, Sikh or any other is as good as, if not better than, the average British tommy. He felt that the latter was generally too young when he was drafted to India to compete on equal terms with the former. "Young as they are, their *superior weapons* and the *prestige of the dominant race* enable them to maintain their superiority over the native troops. *But in the present war several incidents have occured, unimportant, insignificant, it is true, but which, in the interest of Imperial expediency are better forgotten.*

"The native regiments are ten years older than the British regiments. Many of their men have seen service and have been under fire. Some of them have several medals. All, of course, are habituated to the natural conditions. It is evident how many advantages they enjoy. *It is also apparent how very serious the consequences would be if they imagined they possessed any superiority. That such an assumption should even be possible is a menace to our very existence in India.*"[3]

1. *Ibid.* p. 40 2. *Ibid.* p. 41 3. *Ibid.* p. 297

This budding Imperialist even thought of his favourite polo as a weapon in the rulers' armoury and as an excellent medium for strengthening the good relations between the Indian Princes and the British officers. "It may seem strange to speak of polo as an imperial factor, but it would not be the first time in history that national games have played a part in high politics."[1] Not for nothing did the old adage warn those who were invited to sup with the devil to provide themselves with long spoons!

It goes without saying that Churchill heartily approved of what is known as the Forward Policy on the Frontier, though "it is unfortunate for the tribesmen that our spheres of influence clash with their spheres of existence." Such moral scruples were of no use once the Rubicon was crossed. "The Full steam ahead method would be undoubtedly the most desirable.....Military rule is the rule best suited to the character and comprehension of the tribesmen."[2] The British Government of those days was not, however, in the mood to find either the money or the troops to carry out such a vigorous policy. "The inevitable alternative.....is a system of gradual advance, of *political intrigue* among the tribes, of subsidies and small expeditions.....From a general survey of the people and the country, it would seem, that silver makes a better weapon than steel."[3]

This is how the author concludes the book:

"The year 1897, in the annals of the British people, was marked by a declaration to the whole world of our faith in the higher destinies of our race. If a strong man, when the wine sparkles at the feast, and the lights are bright, boasts of his prowess, it is well he should have an opportunity of showing in the cold and grey of the morning, that he is no idle braggart. And unborn arbiters, with a wider knowledge and a more developed intelligence, may, not im-

1. *Ibid.* p. 231-32 2. *Ibid.* p. 311 3. *Ibid.* pp. 311-12

probably trace in recent events, the influence of that mysterious Power, which, directing the progress of our species, and regulating the rise and fall of empires, has found a needed opportunity for a people, of whom at least it may be said that they have added to the happiness, the learning and the liberties of mankind."

This may appear to the irreverent reader a tall order on the mysterious Power but the fact that Churchill, who had just turned twenty-three, was capable of dishing out such Machiavellian dicta, garnished with the usual sanctimonious Imperial sauce, throws a flood of light on all his subsequent career. The echo of those precocious pronouncements made in the Cavalry Barracks of Bangalore in 1897 was to be heard across the oceans, after four and half decades, in the Mansion House of London. Churchill the subaltern may not have been sure whether the Imperial Democracy of England is the proprietor or trustee of those great estates that lie beyond the sea. Churchill the Prime Minister knew. Like the crack of doom fell his words on the ears of a world which believed itself to be fighting for democracy and freedom: *WE HOLD WHAT WE HAVE!*

CHAPTER IV

"FAITHFUL, THOUGH UNFORTUNATE"*

I am an intellectual chap
And think of things that would astonish you,
I often think it is comical,
How nature always does contrive
That every boy and every gal
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a Little Liberal,
Or else a Big Conservative.

—OLD TORY SONG

* This is the heraldic motto of Churchill—*Fiel Pero Desdichado.*

BEING the grandson of a Duke, it was not in the least comical that Winston Churchill should begin life as a Big Conservative, though subsequently he was to become a Little Liberal for twenty long years. The reader who has followed the career of Churchill so far will nevertheless wonder how this young fellow, who until a couple of years earlier felt bewildered by terms like "Ethics" and "The Socratic Method", should step forth in his very first book as a full-blooded Imperialist, like Athena springing out of the head of Zeus. Macaulay may account for his style and even for his prejudices. But deeper influences must have been at work to make Churchill such a devout believer in "the higher destinies of our race", "its perpetual inheritance", "The Imperial Democracy of England" and such other jingo claptrap, which he gushed forth at the very first opportunity.

That influence can be traced directly to his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. Little is known to the present generation of the meteoric rise and fall of that brilliant personality in the eighties, though Winston Churchill has paid his filial debt with two bulky volumes of Lord Randolph's biography. Father and son came in intimate contact rarely in Winston's juvenile and adolescent years and Lord Randolph's premature demise deprived him of the paternal guidance on the very eve of manhood.

As so often happens, the very lack of free and easy relations between father and son and their early severance, left the deepest impress on Winston's mind. "I took my politics almost unquestioningly from him,"[1] wrote Churchill of his father many years later. During Lord Randolph's life-time he worshipped him from afar and after his death "there remained for me only to pursue his aims and vindicate his memory."[2]

1 *Thoughts and Adventures* p. 52 2 *My Early Life* p. 76

Winston Churchilll was not the first scion of Marlborough either to set foot on Indian soil or to devote attention "to the land and the people of Hindostan, that most truly bright and precious gem in the crown of the Queen." That honour and this phrase (which is often erroneously attributed to Winston) belong to his father Lord Randolph Churchill. If few people in India remember that Prime Minister Churchill spent three years of his life in their midst at the turn of the century, fewer still know that his father visited this country as a cold weather tourist in 1884-85, or that he acted as the Secretary of State for India during the latter half of 1885.

Lord Randolph Churchill can indeed claim to be the last of the Empire-Builders, for it was he who was primarily responsible for the annexation of Burma to the British Empire on the 1st of January 1886. During his visit Lord Randolph did all the regulation rounds: tiger hunting on an elephant, the Taj by moonlight, the States with their fireworks and nautch girls. Besides this, soon after his arrival in Bombay he had a long interview with eight of the leading "native" politicians in which they set forth with great ability their various grievances.[1] This is interesting in view of the fact that preliminary discussions for founding the Indian National Congress were taking place at that time. Soon after his return home, Lord Randolph took charge of the India Office "at that time, with the exception of the Foreign Office, the most anxious and important of ministerial posts."[2] In Benares, he was fascinated by the gory spectacle of the burning ghats and readers will find in the following quotation from one of his letters an apt illustration of his biting wit, which is inherited in full measure by his son : "Any Hindu who dies at Benares and whose ashes are thrown into the Ganges, goes right bang up to

1 *Lord Randolph Churchill* Vol. I p. 557 2 *Ibid.*p. 425

heaven without stopping, no matter how great a rascal he may have been. I think the G. O. M. ought to come here; it is his last chance."[1]

Lord Randolph's tenure of office was too brief to be memorable. The beginning of his regime as the Grand Moghul in Whitehall was rather shaky. His many exploits on the floor of the House and outside had won for him the nickname of "Cheeky Randy" (among many others). In spite of this, he confessed to a friend after his first meeting of the India Council that he had felt "like an Eton boy presiding at the meeting of the Masters". This proved only a momentary weakness and soon he had his grip on the India Office as well as India, which he exhibited when he unceremoniously rejected the suggested appointment of the Duke of Connaught to the Command of the Bombay Army (which was then an independent unit) in spite of the August Mother's own wish and the support of both the Prime Minister and the Governor-General.

The new Secretary of State soon began to lay about him vigorously and his vigour was injected into all spheres of Indian administration. In his Budget speech on August 6, 1885, he created a first-class sensation by elaborately indicting the administration of Lord Ripon, the previous Viceroy: "I found in it not one redeeming feature. Indian interests were so clumsily, so stupidly, handled that progress has been thrown back almost for a generation.....I disown and repudiate on behalf of the present Government all responsibility of any sort or kind for that policy and I hold up that Viceroyalty and the Government responsible for it to the censure and the condemnation of the British and Indian people."[2] This is probably the first and the last instance

1 *Ibid.* p. 563 Tory Lord Randolph was the inveterate adversary of Gladstone, the Grand Old Man of the Liberals.

2 *Ibid.* p. 497

in history when a Viceroy was publicly chastised by a Secretary of State, though it is obvious that the fierce party passions of those days must have had not a little to do with such an amazing contretemps.

Nor did he spare the members of Parliament themselves. "It would appear as if members of Parliament of the present generation considered Indian affairs to be either beneath their attention or above their comprehension, and India is apparently left to pursue its destiny alone—some might even think uncared for—as far as Parliament is concerned. That was not always the case."[1]

"I would ask those who hear me to join in an appeal to the members of the new Parliament to shake themselves free from the lassitude, the carelessness, the apathy, which have too long characterised the attitude of Parliament towards India. I would appeal to them to watch with the most sedulous attention, to develop with the most anxious care, to guard with the most united and undying resolution, the land and the people of Hindostan, that most truly bright and precious gem in the crown of the Queen, the possession of which, more than that of all your Colonial dominions, has raised in power, in resource, in wealth and in authority this small island home of ours far above the level of the majority of nations and of States—has placed it on an equality with, perhaps even in a position of superiority over, every other Empire either of ancient or of modern time."[2]

Biographers of Churchill will seize this parental adjuration as a searchlight to illumine the obscurantist Indian policy which he has followed all through his life. He has never been a martyr to the virtue of consistency. His political career has been a living sermon on the famous Emersonian text: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Like the skin of the chameleon

1 *Ibid.* p. 497 2 *Ibid.* p. 498

it has sported different hues at different times. Since his political baptism at Oldham in 1899 he has stood on the hustings with variegated party labels on his lapels. Beginning as a true-blue Conservative, he has rung frequent changes as a Tory Democrat, Unionist, Free Trader, Liberal, Coalition Liberal, Liberal Free Trader, Anti-Socialist, Constitutionalist, again a Conservative and since May 1940 as the head of the National Government.

But the standard of Imperial Democracy which Churchill raised in Bangalore in 1897, long before he entered politics, has never been hauled down in spite of all this stormy passage through various parties and principles. He has treasured it as a sacred legacy of his father. The echoes of his father's command "to watch, develop and guard that most truly bright and precious gem in the crown of the Queen" still ring in his ears in the midst of a global armageddon when he rises in the House to make his rare statements on what is called the Indian situation. Winston Churchill has been faithful to his father, though it has all been unfortunate for the 400 million people of India and may be—history may prove—for himself too.

In the summer of 1899 Churchill resigned his commission and said good-bye to India. He still nursed his dislocated shoulder but his three years' stay in India had otherwise proved fruitful for him. He had outgrown his youthful exuberance and begun to entertain the ambitions of manhood. His martial appetite was quenched with the spells of fighting on the Frontier and the Soudan and he had learnt anew in his own person the truth of the old saying that the pen is mightier than the sword—apart from being far more paying !

He came to India as a soldier and returned as an author. India had no doubt to hear plenty of his sabre-rattling in later years but so far as he could see then, he

had shaken the dust of this country off his feet for good. He had to write his books and earn some money, to get himself elected to the House of Commons and make a name. He had to follow the footsteps of his great father, to pursue his aims and vindicate his memory, perhaps to win the highest crown of British public life, which he had so cruelly missed.

All this he proceeded to accomplish with the greatest ease and success. He finished his *River War*, the book on the Soudan campaign which he had begun in India ; made two unsuccessful attempts at bye-elections ; enjoyed a much publicised interlude as a war correspondent in the Boer war ; got himself elected to Parliament from the Oldham constituency in 1900 ; went on lecture tours in Britain and the United States and banked a modest nest-egg of £ 10,000. Not a bad record for a young man of twenty-six ! It is interesting to note that a journalist whom he met on the homebound steamer from India had hailed him as " the youngest man in Europe. At the rate he goes, there will hardly be room for him in Parliament at thirty or in England at forty." Few prophecies have been so brilliantly, if belatedly, fulfilled.

Churchill took his seat in 1901 in the first Parliament of King Edward VII. He lost no time in making his maiden speech and in his very third appearance in the House of Commons he created a sensation by opposing the War Office scheme of army reforms which entailed a new expenditure of thirty million. In his speech he feelingly recalled the " half-forgotten episode " when a former Chancellor of the Exchequer had resigned because the Service estimates were not reduced and hazarded " to lift the tattered flag I found lying on a stricken field. " This was a very serious thing to do for a new member and it strikingly revealed that Churchill's loyalty to his father

was greater than that to his party, for that Chancellor of the Exchequer was none other than Lord Randolph himself.

From 1899 when he bade his farewell to India to the year 1929 when he raised the war-cry of "Empire in danger," Churchill does not seem to have excessively interested himself in Indian affairs. Of course, for a good many of those thirty years, he was a member of the British Government. In fact, except for two years in the early twenties, he was continuously associated with the Cabinet in one capacity or other ever since he became Under-Secretary for Colonies in 1905 until 1929, when he relinquished the Chancellorship of the Exchequer on the fall of the Conservative Government.

He can thus claim to have participated in all the schemes of constitutional reform which were adumbrated during this memorable period—the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1908, the Montford Reforms of 1919 and the still-born Simon Commission proposals of 1929. This is indeed a unique achievement, for the first scheme was the offspring of a Liberal Government, the second the darling of a Coalition Government, while the third was a bastard begotten by a Tory Government out of a Liberal. Winston Churchill who had boxed the political compass within a score of years, was present at all those deliveries.

The shadow of the young soldier who quitted India's shores in 1899 has thus been constantly hovering over her since then. In his constitutional capacity as a member of Parliament, Churchill must have kept his interest in "the great estates beyond the sea" in which he gambolled for three delightful years of his life. But he seems to have been content to trust the man in charge to do his job, to let well alone. He did not develop the itch to guide India's destinies with his own hands until 1929—though it had to remain unsatisfied for another decade until he joined

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Neville Chamberlain's Government on the morrow of the second world war. There is not a single reference to Churchill either in the Countess of Minto's famous *India: Minto and Morley* or in Edwin Montagu's intimate *Indian Diary*—two books which give revealing back-stage glimpses into Indo-British relations during the first two decades of this century.

CHAPTER V

LESSONS IN LIBERALISM

THOUGH it is a stirring story in itself, the rise of Winston Churchill to the office of an Under-Secretary at 31, within six years of his election to the Commons, and his subsequent great achievements do not form part of the present narrative. We have already seen that after taking his seat he lost no time in "lifting the tattered flag which he found lying on a stricken field." He also made occasional references to Imperial Democracy—the phrase which he first used in his preface to *The Malakand Field Force*—which fell upon the ears of the Tory benches as a faint echo of Lord Randolph Churchill's "Tory Democracy."

Before he could flourish his full-blooded Imperialism, however, an event occurred which was to set the ship of his career in a different direction. In 1904 amidst the cries of "Rat" from Tory ranks, Winston Churchill crossed the floor and cast his lot with the Liberal opposition. It was a daring, decisive break with the past, for a person of Churchill's past, though much of its sting was taken out by the return of the prodigal to the ancestral fold twenty years later. At the time it was viewed by his friends as an intelligent anticipation of the landslide in the ensuing General

Election, and the Liberals welcomed the Tory renegade with open arms.

It was a brilliant company in which Churchill found himself : Morley, Asquith, Lloyd George, Halden, Grey —each a host in himself, each a leading light of the Liberal party. The Tory convert had to put himself on his best behaviour among his new friends, and not do too much of the flag-waving or tub-thumping of which he gave such an exhibition in his first book. The British Liberals, unlike the Tories who stick to the shadow as well as to the substance, are content only with the substance. They do not use the word Imperialism in its vulgar, grabbing sense. It is used only in a benevolent context on high occasions. And lately it is being discarded altogether in favour of the impeccable term *Commonwealth*. No, the word is not the thing with enlightened Englishmen.

Churchill took his first lessons in Liberalism from John Morley. The young neophyte could not have found a more venerable *Guru*. This Nestor of British Liberalism was the spiritual offspring of John Stuart Mill, the political successor of Gladstone (even though he never adorned 10, Downing Street,) and the world-famous biographer of those great prophets of the French Revolution—Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau. Churchill knew him since 1896 and their acquaintance soon grew into a lively comradeship at the Cabinet table. Morley had a soft corner for the son of his old friend, Lord Randolph Churchill, though he "now and then mistakes a frothy bubble for a great wave."[1] A paternal benignity on the part of the elder statesman and a respectful admiration from the side of the younger colleague helped to bridge the gulf of thirty-five years separating them.

In the invulnerable armour of Morley's liberalism there

1. Lord Morley *Recollections* Vol. II p. 304

was only one little chink—India ! In his "gilded Pagoda" at the India Office he was as blind to democracy as any noon-day owl. That massive mind, nurtured on the pure milk of Burke and Mill and Bright, was capable of the most absurd fallacies and of the most grievous violence to his principles when dealing with Indian issues. Listen to this outburst when he heard a member of Parliament remark that whatever is good in the way of self-government for Canada must be good for India : "That is the most concise statement that I can imagine, of the grossest fallacy in all politics. It is a thoroughly dangerous fallacy.....You might just as well say that, because a fur coat in Canada at certain times of the year is a truly comfortable garment, therefore a fur coat in the Deccan is just the very garment that you would be delighted to wear."[1]

Morley was the first high priest of the policy of reforms with one hand and firm rule with the other, which his successors are devotedly following ever since. It can truly be said of him that his right hand did not know what his left was doing ! Nor did reforms in the Morley sense ever envisage the introduction of popular government in India. He categorically observed : "If my existence, either officially or corporeally, were prolonged twenty times longer than either of them is likely to be, a Parliamentary system in India is not at all the goal to which I would for one moment aspire."[2] No wonder that the cult of terrorism thrived in the darkness that then prevailed in India under this lamp of Liberalism shining in Whitehall.

Morley is dwelt upon at some length here because of his great influence on the political evolution of Churchill—an influence which the latter has often warmly acknowledged. The association of such a savant must have enlightened and broadened a mind which till then was striking its roots and

1 *Indian Speeches* pp. 35-6 2 *Ibid.* p. 92

throwing its branches, impelled by its own native vigour, but without any proper intellectual nourishment. As far as India is concerned, however, this contact seems purely ominous in the retrospect.

It was one Stygian darkness calling to another Stygian darkness. The reactionary views on India, which Churchill had inherited from his father and which had hardened under Macaulay's influence, became finally ossified during his long association with Morley. Not even the terrific impact of two world wars has succeeded in shock-curing Winston Churchill of this triple legacy.

Long after Morley's death, when he was in the thick of the fight on the Indian issue, Churchill recalled with an appreciative chuckle the lessons he had learnt at the feet of the former: "At the India Office he (Morley) was an autocrat and almost a martinet. After several years, he shaped the first modest proposals for Indian representative government now known as the 'Morley-Minto Reforms'. He, the ardent apostle of Irish self-government, felt no sense of contradiction in declaring his hostility to anything like 'Home Rule for India.'

"He went out of his way to challenge Radical opinion on this issue, and in an impressive speech he warned his own supporters of the perils of applying to the vast Indian scene the principles which he applauded in Ireland and in South Africa: 'There is, I know, a school of thought who say that we might wisely walk out of India, and that the Indians can manage their own affairs better than we can. Anyone who pictures to himself the anarchy, the bloody chaos that would follow, might shrink from that sinister decision.'

"And again: 'When across the dark distances, you hear the sullen roar and scream of carnage and confusion, your hearts will reproach you with what you have done'.

All his thought and outlook made a strong impression upon me. But times have changed, and I have lived to see the chiefs of the Conservative Party rush in where Radical Morley feared to tread."[1]

Nevertheless in the first bloom of his conversion, Churchill tried his level best to become a faithful Liberal. Soon after he was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, he delivered himself of the following democratic dicta: "The system of Representative Government without responsible ministers with responsible powers has led to endless friction and inconvenience whenever and wherever it has been employed." In 1906: "It is the same in politics as it is in war. When one crest line has been left, it is necessary to go to the next. To halt halfway in the valley between is to court swift and certain destruction and the moment you have abandoned the safe position of a Crown Colony Government or Government with an adequate nominated majority, there is no stopping place whatever on which you may rest the sole of your feet, until you come to a responsible Legislative Assembly with an executive obeying that Assembly."

It seems odd to-day that such unexceptionable words should have fallen from the lips of Churchill nearly four decades ago. However, the occasional references to him in W. S. Blunt's *Diaries*—a book which is not as well-known in this country as it deserves to be—reveal that in his new-found zeal for Liberalism, Churchill was not then afraid to dally with the most dangerous ideas. Early in 1910 he hinted to Blunt: "I think you may see me yet carry out your ideas", meaning, adds the punctilious Diarist. "my anti-Imperial ideas"!

More amazing still is the admission made by Churchill to the author: "If they (Indians) ever unite against us and

1. Churchill *Great Contemporaries* pp. 84-85

put us in Coventry all round, the game would be up. If they agree to have nothing at all to do with us, the whole thing would collapse."[1] In similar vein is another conversation piece: "He (Churchill) admitted, however, that India does not pay its expense to us in men or money and it seems to me that he would be pretty easily persuaded to let it go, were the pressure severe enough. Like most of them, it is the vanity of Empire that affects him more than supposed profit or the necessities of trade, which he repudiates; also, doubtless, his military training counts much in his Imperialism. He will come round to me in time."[2] A vain hope, though it was frequently expressed by the conscientious Diarist.

Most revealing of all, is the light thrown on Churchill's attitude to the Indian revolutionary movement, which was extremely active during 1906-10. Madan Lal Dhingra, one of the members of the India House and a close associate of V. D. Savarkar (then Indian Revolutionary No. 1; at present President of the Hindu Mahasabha) shot Sir Curzon Wyllie, the political A. D. C. of the India Office at a gathering in the Imperial Institute, London, on July 1, 1909. Dhingra's aim was "to shed English blood as a humble protest against the inhuman transportations and hangings of Indian youths."[3] The murder and Dhingra's subsequent trial had created a great deal of sensation in Britain and Blunt refers to it more than once.

Here is the record of an important conversation under date Sunday, October 3, 1909: "Among the many memorable things that Churchill said was this: Talking of Dingra, he said that there had been much discussion in the Cabinet about him. Lloyd George had expressed to him his highest admiration of Dingra's attitude as a patriot, in which he

1 W. S. Blunt *My Diaries* Vol. II p. 281 2 *Ibid.* p. 287
3 J. N. Singh *Landmarks in Indian Constitutional and National Development* p. 338

(Churchill) shared. He will be remembered 2,000 years hence, as we remember Regulus and Caractacus and Plutarch's heroes, and Churchill quoted with admiration Dingra's last words as the finest ever made in the name of patriotism. All the same, he says that he was strongly in favour of the law taking its course, even to the extent of refusing to give back the body of the hanged man to his friends for their own funeral rites. He quite understood that it would have been an additional torture to have commuted the sentence."[1]

Before bidding farewell to the Diarist, one must point out in fairness to him that within a few years he confessed to be completely disillusioned regarding Churchill changing his spots and turning an anti-Imperialist. He ruefully notes on October 21, 1912 :

" Winston is quite changed on these matters from what he was two years ago, when I had hopes of encouraging him to better things. How like his father !.....One might be excused for thinking what is commonly said by the Tories, that Winston will one day return to the Tory fold. His old connection with the army and now with the navy has turned his mind back into an ultra-Imperialist groove. This I think will be a stronger temptation for him than any mere intrigue of ambition."[2]

Churchill had by this time taken over the Admiralty and all his energies were directed towards one goal—to make the navy ready for the war. With maps and charts spread around him, his all absorbing thought was : "What happens if war with Germany begins to-day ?" He was in a position to give the most satisfactory answer when that fateful day actually dawned. But meanwhile and till the war was won, he had laid aside all other occupations. The shady avenues of Bangalore and the gaunt hills of the Frontier faded out

1 W. S. Blunt *My Diaries* Vol. II p. 288 2 *Ibid.* p. 417

of his memory and he seems not to have taken any part even in the shaping of the Montford Reforms which were rushed through the war.

Perhaps Montagu himself did not brook any interference from his colleagues. His passion then was India as Churchill's was the war, and the latter paid the former a graceful compliment in a speech in the Commons in 1920. "I was astonished," observed Churchill, "by my Right Honourable friend's sense of detachment when in the supreme crisis of the War, he calmly journeyed to India and remained for many months absorbed and buried in Indian affairs." No wonder Montagu succeeded in achieving in World War I what his successors have so disastrously failed to do in World War II—keeping India tranquil—though even he could not satisfy the modest aspirations of the Indian people.

CHAPTER VI

LEGACY OF BIRKENHEAD

THERE is no denying the fact that Churchill generally toed the Montford Reforms line during those days and that as a member of the Coalition Government he was fully responsible for the policy followed in India. A decade later, when he started stumping the country as the evangelist of "Firm rule and no nonsense in India", he was naturally twitted for such a sudden change of front. He was asked why, when he was himself a Minister, he should have supported the reforms which he was so violently opposing now.

On various occasions Churchill made disingenuous and

generally futile attempts to explain away his responsibility for the Montford Reforms, such as it was. He summed up his arguments in the introduction to the collection of his speeches on India as follows: "In those days the War Cabinet was supreme. Its five members alone bore constitutional responsibility for policy. The Secretaries of State and other high functionaries were expressly relieved of all responsibility except for the proper discharge of their departmental duties.....It was in this interval that the Act of 1919 was framed. It was settled entirely between the members of the War Cabinet and the Secretary of State for India. The rest of the departmental heads were not formally consulted and had no ground to demand to be taken into counsel.....The War Cabinet wound itself up at the end of October and the normal Cabinet met for the first time on November 3, 1919. The India Bill had been introduced in the House of Commons in the preceding May, and had been remitted to a Joint Committee of both Houses from which it had now emerged as an agreed measure. It was eventually passed through its remaining stages without a division on any cardinal issue."

This, however, sounds as an afterthought in view of the following remarks of Lord Birkenhead in a letter to Lord Reading (then Viceroy of India) dated December 4, 1924—seven years before Churchill's apologia quoted above: "I think you know that alone in the Cabinet I distrusted, and *indeed to some extent opposed*, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report."[1] It may be pointed out that Birkenhead, like Churchill, was not a member of the War Cabinet.

Indeed, even after the alleged gag was removed, Churchill does not seem to have expressed any misgivings either about the provisions of the Act or about the future of "the great estates beyond the sea," in public or in

1 *Frederic Edwin Earl of Birkenhead, The Last Phase* by His Son p. 245

private. On the contrary he always stood loyally by the Montford Reforms and took every opportunity to defend the Government until the final collapse of the Lloyd George Coalition in 1922. Not even in the succeeding two years, when Churchill was thrown out of Parliament and was experiencing the first taste of wilderness, did he take the least interest in Indian affairs. Possibly in view of his being still a Liberal, and the Tories themselves having returned to the saddle under Bonar Law, India could not have served as a lever for political come-back as it did after 1929 when he could visit all the evils on earth on the head of the Socialist Government.

Thus we find him in July 1920 castigating the notorious General Dyer and condemning the policy of frightfulness which had resulted in the shambles of the Jallianwallah Bagh. One may consider this to be a question of sheer humanity, but it must be remembered that even a Dyer had his defenders in high Tory ranks to which Churchill was to return within four years. It is an historic fact that the man who killed hundreds of Indians in cold blood was honoured with a purse by a number of Britishers, to compensate him for the mildest of mild punishments inflicted upon him by the Army Council.

It was in support of that decision of the Army Council that Churchill spoke in the Commons. He had no hesitation in stigmatising the Amritsar episode as "without precedent or parallel in the modern history of the British Empire.....It is an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in singular and sinister isolation." Such frightfulness, said Churchill, is not "the British way of doing business," which implies close and effectual co-operation with the people of the country "whose princes spent their treasures

in our cause, whose brave soldiers fought side by side with our men, whose intelligent and gifted people are co-operating at the present moment with us in every sphere of Government and of industry." Finally he commended "that sense of unity and progress in co-operation which must ever ally and bind together the British and Indian peoples."

This velvet glove of unity and co-operation nevertheless hid the iron hand of military might. And Churchill proceeded to dwell upon it in an outspoken manner:

"Take the Mutiny as the datum line. In those days, there were normally 40,000 British troops in the country, and the ratio of British troops to native troops was one to five. The native Indian Army had a powerful artillery, of which they made tremendous use. There were no railways, no modern appliances, and yet the Mutiny was effectively suppressed by the use of a military power far inferior to that which we now possess in India. Since then the British troops have been raised to 70,000 and upwards, and the ratio of British to native troops is one to two. There is no native artillery of any kind. The power and the importance of the artillery has increased in the meantime ten and perhaps twenty-fold. Since then a whole series of wonderful and powerful war inventions have come into being, and the whole apparatus of scientific war is at the disposal of the British Government in India—machine guns, the magazine rifle, cordite ammunition, which cannot be manufactured as gunpowder was manufactured by a non-scientific power, and which is all stored up in the magazines under the control of the white troops. Then there have been great developments which have followed the conquest of the air and the evolution of the aeroplane. Even if the railways and the telegraphs were cut or rendered useless by a strike, motor lorries and wireless telegraphy would give increasingly the means of concentrating troops, and taking them about the

country with an extraordinary and almost undreamed-of facility."[1]

If this very blunt statement made in 1920 vividly recalls the subaltern of twenty-two years earlier writing in Bangalore his *Malakand Field Force*, it also prophetically anticipates the Prime Minister of twenty-two years later making his historic statement regarding the "Quit India" disturbances, in the Commons on September 10, 1942. Remember that Churchill was then a Liberal; that he was a Government spokesman pronouncing in the Mother of Parliaments the final verdict on the most frightful episode in the 150 years of British rule in India; that he was then standing midway in his career.

Another interesting reference made by Churchill to India in the "convert" phase of his political life was during the speech he delivered in June 1921 at a dinner given by the Empire Development Parliamentary Committee to the Prime Ministers of the British Dominion Governments and representatives of India, who were then in London for the Imperial Conference. The noteworthy fact in the following extract is the explicit mention of Dominion Status —two words which he had bitterly to repent afterwards:

"India was now coming into our affairs and councils as a partner, a powerful partner. We well knew how tremendous was the contribution which India made in the war in 1914; how, when there was no other means of filling a portion of the Front by men from any other part of the whole world, there came the two splendid Indian corps, who were almost annihilated in the mud and the shell fire of that terrible winter in Flanders. We owed India that deep debt, and we looked forward confidently to the days when the Indian Government and people would have assumed fully and completely their Dominion Status."

1 *Speech in House of Commons, July 8, 1920*

In 1924 Churchill made up his mind not to languish any longer in the Liberal wilderness. The installation of a Labour Government with the help of the Liberals had shocked his political conscience. He would never shake hands with the Socialists. He therefore finally cut the painter that bound him to the Liberals, whose days as a party were numbered, succeeded at last in getting himself re-elected to the Parliament as a Constitutionalist, and became the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the second Baldwin Government—the first time he held office as a Conservative.

Churchill's colleague as the Secretary of State for India was an arrogant Imperialist like Lord Birkenhead. He brought to his office " a profound mistrust of Montagu-Chelmsford policy, and a belief that India would not be capable of supporting Dominion Status for centuries. "[1] Again "The Montagu-constitution was a mistake, ill-conceived and potentially extremely mischievous."[2] The new Secretary of State therefore immediately started a systematic, if subtle, sabotage of the Reforms, though he himself (like Churchill) was morally as well as constitutionally responsible for their introduction only three years earlier. The phrase " Dominion Status " naturally stank in his nostrils as it began to do in Churchill's later on, in spite of the latter having felicitously used it himself in 1921. Indeed, most of the sentiments and many of the phrases which inspired Churchill's Indian campaign in the thirties were borrowed from Birkenhead's utterances in the twenties and a study of the latter's regime at the India Office is thus instructive as well as interesting.

No sooner did Birkenhead take charge of his portfolio than he wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Reading, that " to me it is frankly inconceivable that India will ever be fit for Dominion Self-Government. " Again and again he returned to

1 *Birkenhead, Last Phase* by His Son p. 245 2 *Ibid.* p. 261

this theme in his correspondence with the Viceroy and finally warned Lord Irwin in his letter of May 3, 1928, that " His Majesty's Government were averse from using the term ' Dominion Status ' to describe even the ultimate and remote goal of Indian political development, because it has been laid down that Dominion Status means ' the right to decide their own destinies,' and this right we were not prepared to accord to India at present, or in any way to prejudge the question whether it should ever be accorded."[1] This particular virus against the phrase " Dominion Status " was handed over to Churchill as a legacy after Birkenhead's resignation and subsequent death in 1930.

With the ingenuity of the lawyer that he was, Birkenhead decided that the best way of killing the spirit of the Montford Reforms would be to stick only to its words. The Government of India Act of 1919 laid it down that " A Statutory Commission be appointed to inquire into the working of the system of government at the expiration of ten years after passing of this Act." Actually the date was anticipated and the Simon Commission was appointed in November 1927. At that time it was viewed as a triumph of Indian opinion, which was agitating for a number of years for the acceleration of reforms. The Central Legislative Assembly had passed in 1924 the famous resolution moved by Pandit Motilal Nehru demanding Dominion Status for India and the convening of a Round Table Conference, to draw up a constitution for establishing full Responsible Government.

It was believed that the Government had at last made a response to Indian demands, however belated and halting it might be. A number of books published since then have unfortunately treated this myth as a sober fact. The fact is that Lord Birkenhead had taken the earliest opportunity

1. *Ibid*, p. 258

to inform the Viceroy that "the extreme Nationalist agitation for Swarajya inclined him rather to contract than to expand any further promises of constitutional reforms." Nevertheless. from the very beginning, his mind was considerably exercised by the question of the appointment of the Statutory Commission. The following extract from a letter written to Lord Reading as early as December 1925 shows "how strongly he recoiled from the possibility of the Socialist Government handling the appointment of the Commission."

"When I made my speech in the House of Lords suggesting that it might be possible to accelerate the Commission of 1928,.....I always had it plainly in my mind that we could not afford to run the slightest risk that the nomination of the 1928 Commission should be in the hands of our successors. You can readily imagine what kind of a Commission in its personnel would have been appointed by Colonel Wedgewood and his friends. I have, therefore, throughout, been of the clear opinion that it would be necessary for us, as a matter of elementary prudence, to appoint the Commission not later than the summer of 1927 .....I am sure that having regard to political contingencies in this country, we must keep the nomination of the personnel of this Commission in our own hands. In this matter we cannot run the slightest risk." [1]

Even after the Commission was appointed and had set about its task, Birkenhead lost no opportunity of priming its members and guiding its deliberations—a fact which will shock many of our countrymen who consider a Royal Commission to be a sacred oracle and honour its members as Vestal Virgins. Indian politicians have indeed a fatal weakness for asking for Royal Commissions on various grounds for redressing all kinds of grievances,—such a demand having

1 *Ibid.* pp. 250-51

been made recently for an inquiry into the Bengal famine of 1943 and even for determining the responsibility of the country-wide disturbances of 1942! Let all those who still profess such a pathetic faith in the semi-divine efficacy of Royal Commissions reflect upon the following instructions given by Birkenhead to Lord (then Sir John) Simon (who was received in India with cries of *Go back, Simon !*) in a letter to Irwin :

" I should advise Simon to see at all stages important people who are not boycotting the Simon Commission, particularly Moslems and the depressed classes. I should widely advertise all his interviews with representative Moslems. The whole policy now is obvious. It is to terrify the immense Hindu population by the apprehension that the Commission is being got hold of by the Moslems and may present a report altogether destructive of the Hindu position, thereby securing a solid Moslem support, and leaving Jinnah high and dry." [1]

No wonder that Churchill always swore by the Simon Commission Report with bell, book and candle during all the succeeding years of virulent warfare over the Indian reforms. It must have given him a profound shock to find the edifice raised with such consummate artifice by his friend Birkenhead collapsing like a pack of cards when that " Boneless wonder, " Ramsay Macdonald, airily summoned a Round Table Conference in London in 1930. But I am anticipating.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT DIVIDE

THE year, 1929 will go down in the history of India as the year of the Great Divide. It is not so much what happened

1 *Ibid.* p. 255

during the twelve months which matters today, though by themselves the succession of events make of 1929 an *annus mirabilis.* Its historical significance lies in its association with a certain idea—an idea which closed one epoch and opened another—the idea of Indian Independence. 1929 is evocative, as 1857 is evocative !

What a host of memories it recalls to the mind of those who are old enough to remember and more so, of those who were then young enough to feel in their own life the impact of revolutionary ideas :

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven !

Vithalbhai Patel in his presidential wig and gown giving battle to the bureaucracy in its very citadel. The great labour strikes at Bombay, Calcutta and Golmuri. International working-class solidarity exemplified in the Meerut Conspiracy case. Bhagat Singh throwing the bomb in the Legislative Assembly. Jatindra Nath Das fasting for 64 centipede-crawling days unto death. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, taking the cue from Ramsay Macdonald, who had become Britain's Prime Minister for the second time, and offering Dominion Status to India as " the natural issue of India's constitutional progress ". The Congress crown of thorns passing symbolically from father to son, from the aristocratic lawyer Motilal Nehru to the republican rebel Jawaharlal Nehru. The latter ascending the rostrum at Lahore and raising the standard of Complete Independence. The challenging cry *Inquilab Zindabad !* (Long live revolution !) raised by a hundred thousand throats.

Complete Independence !

On that high note did that year end. It swept away all the historical illusions, the constitutional cobwebs, the phraseological niceties, the legal quibblings, the weighty

memorandums and the humble deputations in which an earlier generation revelled. Independence was strong meat for those whose spirits were softened by the siren songs of alien rulers or whose bodies were weakened by their all-pervading poverty. The elders, the moderates and those whom the government glorifies as men having a stake in the country—as if the wretchedest beggar born has not a stake in his own motherland !—recoiled from that very word. Even many a stalwart Congressman of the older school wondered in his heart whether the comforting shadow of Dominion Status was not preferable to the dazzling sun of independence.

Jawaharlal Nehru waved away all these doubts and fears with an impatient, imperious sweep of his hand. He declared himself to be no believer in Kings and Princes. India would no longer have any truck with British Imperialism. In Lahore he officially gave the Socialist turn and the international content to the Indian nationalist movement. He visualised the struggle for our freedom as a part—an integral part—of a world movement. He had no delusions about the difficulties ahead : " None of us can say what and when we can achieve. We cannot command success. But success often comes to those who dare and act : it seldom goes to the timid who are ever afraid of the consequences. We play for high stakes and if we seek to achieve great things, it can only be through great dangers. " He replied with biting sarcasm to the Liberal criticism of the Civil Disobedience movement that it was " foolish and ill advised " : " Because when we stood up and put up a good fight we were knocked down : therefore the moral pointed out was that standing up is a bad thing. Crawling is best and safest. It is quite impossible to be knocked down or to fall from the horizontal position. " [1]

1 *Autobiography* p. 425

He dismissed the elaborate discussions then going on regarding the relative merits of Dominion Status and Independence, as the huckstering of the market-place, the lawyer's jargon, the sophistic spinning of words. "Indian freedom and British imperialism are two incompatibles and neither martial law nor all the sugar-coating in the world can make them compatible or bring them together." He summed up the political situation in the following crystal-clear words: "The real thing is the conquest of power by whatever name it may be called. I do not think that any form of Dominion Status applicable to India will give us real power. *A test of this power would be the entire withdrawal of the alien army of occupation and economic control.*"

I said earlier that the year 1929 was evocative. It seems also to have been prophetic. Another thirteen years of struggle and suffering, triumphs and frustration had to pass before the Indian people realised the grim meaning of that acid test ("withdrawal of the alien army of occupation and economic control") laid down by Nehru with the dying breath of that memorable year. And we are still living on the sanguinary borderland of that Great Divide, between the thunder and the sun, in the twilight of freedom.

In the life of Winston Churchill, too, the year 1929 marks the Great Divide. The fall of the Baldwin Cabinet and the return of the Labour Government as a result of the general election that year sent him into a wilderness from which he was not to emerge for another long decade, until the very morrow of the second world war. True, this was not his first taste of wilderness, for he was not only out of Government but also out of Parliament between 1922 and 24. But there was a clear-cut finality about his 1929 exit from the political stage which his earlier disappearance lacked.

In 1922 the Liberal Secretary of State for Colonies went into the wings only to return two Cabinets later in his new role as the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1929 the footlights no longer beckoned him back. He was not wanted on the stage, which was occupied by strange and uncouth Socialist figures with whose subversive activities Churchill would have no part or lot. On the contrary, he considered it a sacred mission to save Britain from the Labour blight which had again settled upon it. He deeply abhorred the co-operation which his old friends the Liberals were again extending to the Labour Government. Nor was he satisfied with the good-humoured nonchalance with which Baldwin and his colleagues in the Conservative party viewed the return of Ramsay Macdonald to 10, Downing Street.

Churchill's views on Communism and the bitter antagonism he bears for all such *isms*, which threaten the capitalist order of society, are well-known. After the end of World War I he was one of the foremost exponents of the plan to raise an international crusade to strangle the infant Soviet state, though in the end he had to be content only with raising a "Sanitary Cordon" round Russia to prevent the Red plague[1] from spreading to the capitalist world. Howsoever academic and harmless, the British Socialists were after all distant cousins of the godless Bolsheviks and as long ago as 1924 he had solemnly warned the British people against putting the Socialists in power: "The enthronement in office of a Socialist Government will be a serious national misfortune such as has usually befallen

1. The following extract from "*World Crisis*" *Vol.* V is illuminating. Mr. Churchill is writing about the various German attempts to crush Russian resistance after the abdication of the Czar in 1917: "Nevertheless it was with a sense of awe that they turned upon Russia the most grisly of all weapons. They transported Lenin in a sealed truck like a plague bacillus from Switzerland into Russia." (*Aftermath* p. 73)

great States only on the morrow of the defeat in war. It will delay the return of prosperity. It will open a period of increasing political confusion and disturbance."

None of these dark forebodings had come true in the first brief interlude of Labour Government. Apart from being tied to the apron-strings of the Liberals, Ramsay Macdonald and his colleagues had conclusively proved that they were not of the stuff of which revolutionaries are made. Their milk-and-water Socialism had all the charm of novelty without the least radical kick in it. And the good Conservatives who had to go into the opposition in 1929 had no particular reasons to feel apprehensive about the future. On the contrary, Ramsay Mecdonald's "muddled idealism" was to develop the closest affinity with Stanley Baldwin's "organised inertia" in the hybrid National Government which was formed in 1931.

Nevertheless Churchill's Tory conscience was shocked by the recurrence of such an evil phenomenon within the space of five years. He felt deeply perturbed by the public apathy which made such things possible. The times were out of joint and after having won the war in the teens Britain had already begun to lose the peace in the twenties. He gravely reflected in the course of the Romanes Lectures, which he delivered in 1930: "We see our race doubtful of its mission and no longer confident about its principles, infirm in power, drifting to and fro with the tides and currents of a deeply disturbed ocean. The compass had been damaged. The charts are out of date."

Nor were Baldwin, the Conservative leader, and the mediocrities who surrounded him capable of setting the world aright, as the next ten years conclusively proved. They were apparently content to sail with the current, lie down in their skiffs and serenely contemplate the starry heavens, unmindful of the winds and tides or the shoals and the

rocks around them. Churchill was no doubt a senior member of the inner Conservative conclave but his restless spirit was ill at ease in the lotus-eaters' paradise. The time had yet to come when Churchill was to level the shafts of his invective directly against his leader. Stanley Baldwin on his part had not yet openly expressed his distrust of Churchill's "hundred-horse-power brain".

Nevertheless coolness had already begun to make itself felt in the relations between Churchill and his Conservative colleagues and the prospects of returning to office with the old team gradually began to recede into the background. Churchill was clearly out of step with his party as with the people at large, though in 1929 he could not gauge the extent of the divergence. The bitter realisation was to dawn slowly and in 1929 Churchill could hardly have foreseen that he was not to return to the Treasury Benches for ten long years. At every crisis of his career he had shown the greatest resourcefulness in adapting himself to changed circumstances and always coming on the top of the wave. No wonder then that in 1929, too, he should have looked around him for the means of a comeback, even for a daring bid for leadership in his own party. If Lloyd George could throw Asquith overboard in 1916, if Bonar Law could repeat the trick in 1922, there was no reason why he could not oust Baldwin and wrest the highest crown of his career by becoming the Prime Minister in the next Conservative Government.

As fate would have it, India provided a topical and capital issue to Churchill to launch a fight against Ramsay Macdonald and also to force the pace against Stanley Baldwin. The Dominion Status declaration made in Delhi by Lord Irwin on October 31, 1929, was avidly seized by Churchill not only to discredit the Labour Government but also to snipe at the Conservative leadership. He fired the first shot in the campaign with an article in the hospitable columns

of the *Daily Mail*, attacking the Socialist Government for having chosen "amid all the Utopian dreams and predatory appetites and subversive movements excited by their presence, to make in Parliament and through the Viceroy in India a new declaration." He concluded on the ringing peroration that "it is necessary without delay to marshal sober and resolute forces of the British Empire against the perpetration of such a crime as the immediate grant of Dominion Status."

No wonder his biographers are frankly puzzled by the sudden and intensive interest Churchill began to take in Indian affairs from 1929 onwards. It was to become the major preoccupation of his political career for the next six years. Many of them are inclined to the view that it was only a handy weapon in the party warfare and that Churchill utilised the India Bill, first against Macdonald and later against Baldwin, as Disraeli did the Corn Laws against Peel a century ago. "By raising the cry of the British Raj in danger he would rally to himself all that stolid, diehard core of the party, to whom Baldwin's coquettings with Liberal principles had become anathema."[1] We have seen that during the previous thirty years, ever since his return from India in 1899, Churchill had scarcely devoted any time or attention to Indian affairs except during an occasional speech in the Commons.

It is significant again that though Churchill has adorned all the major offices of State during his long career, he has never entered the India Office. Beginning as the Under-Secretary for the Colonies in 1906 he became, successively, President of the Board of Trade (1908-1910), Home Secretary (1910-11), First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-15), Minister of Munitions (1917-18), Secretary of State for War and Air (1918-21), Secretary for the Colonies (1921-22),

1 Esme Wingfield-Stratford *Churchill: The Making of A Hero* p. 222

and finally Chancellor of the Exchequer (1924-29). Churchill felt immen-ely proud when he put on Lord Randolph's robes of the last-named office, which a fond mother had preserved all those years. But he never cared to follow his father's footsteps into the India Office—a glaring omission in view of his absorption in Indian affairs during the major part of his decade of wilderness.

It may be because the Secretary of State for India is rarely in the limelight. As Lord Morley once said, he is like the aloe, that blooms only once in hundred years. A personality as colourful and as vivid as Churchill's would have felt stifled in the sepulchral recesses of the India Office. Churchill, the parliamentary impresario, knew how to remain constantly under the spotlight and he must have, therefore, instinctively avoided the obscurity of the Indian portfolio. Moreover, the mere fact that he was not the India Secretary did not prevent him from having his say any time on any particular issue, which took his fancy. Early in his Cabinet career he had cultivated the habit of preparing weighty dossiers on all possible subjects under the sun and distributing them among his colleagues. Baldwin once groused that "A Cabinet meeting when Winston was present did not have the opportunity of considering its proper agenda, for the reason that invariably it had first to deal with some extremely clever memorandum submitted by him on the work of some department other than his own."

That indefatigable diarist, Wilfrid Scarven Blunt, noted in his journal on the 2nd of October, 1909 : "I should not be surprised if some day he (Winston) made the Indian cause his own." The prophecy came true twenty years later, though in a directly contrary sense to that envisaged by poor Blunt. It was not such a haphhazard decision as it may seem to the casual observer. Politically India is not

a subject in which the average British voter is either interested or informed. It is an issue, which is generally kept beyond the pale of party politics, for the simple reason that the British people consider India as a sort of communal milchcow which never goes dry. The welfare of two out of every ten Englishmen depends directly upon India.

The belted Earl and the blackened miner, the capitalist director in the City and the soap-box agitator in Hyde Park, the white-collar clerks in London and the grimy spinners of Lancashire—all have a vital stake in India. They are generally not conscious of it and even those few who are consider it bad form to carry their consciousness on their sleeves. A succession of great statesmen and writers have been assuring the British people that their forefathers went to India by divine dispensation and remained there mainly for the spiritual and physical well-being of hundreds of millions of people, who otherwise would have torn each other to pieces. This moral argument for colonial exploitation will go down as the greatest European invention of all times.

Viewed from any angle, therefore, India provided an excellent vaulting pole to Churchill to leap back into political limelight. He would teach a good lesson to the Labour Government for monkeying with that truly bright and precious gem in the King's crown. He could also represent himself to the Conservative rank and file as "among the many faithless, faithful only he" and take its leadership to task for dilly-dallying with the idea of Dominion Status for India. The very ignorance and apathy of the electorate regarding India was an advantage. It would have been very difficult to rouse them up on any other national issue in the then prevailing mood of pacifism and ennui. But India touched everybody's prejudice, pride and pocket. If he could only convince the electorate that Dominion Status for

India would ultimately mean only the liquidation of the British Empire—it would stand up as one man and give short shrift to the Labourite jacks-in-office, to their Liberal supporters and even to the lethargic Conservative leaders, leaving Winston Churchill supreme in the field.

Above all, India was his first love. He had spent the early years of his adult life in garrisoning and guarding "those great estates beyond the sea" and now when they were in dire peril of being lost or expropriated, it was his duty as a true Imperial Knight to stake his all to save them. The veteran statesman of fifty-five would return to the task left unfinished by the callow subaltern of twenty-five. And, finally, was it not a sacred duty bequeathed to him by his great father "to watch with the most sedulous attention, to develop with the most anxious care, to guard with the most united and undying resolution, the land and the people of Hindostan?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE OF HINDOSTAN

THE land and the people of Hindostan ! There they have been for ages, the object of love and reverence, greed and envy, cupidity and rapacity, enlightenment and exploitation, pity, patronising and contempt. Mankind flowered in this land in the earliest dawn of history and the ruins of Mohenjodaro still rise gaunt and grey after thousands of years out of the desert of Sind. And nowhere perhaps has mankind reached a deeper degradation than here. Poverty —man-made poverty—sits on this bounteous land like leprosy and millions are called away to their Maker before our

very eyes, because their rulers could not provide them with a handful of rice.

The land and the people of Hindostan ! 1,623,015 square miles of smiling land and 400 millions of men, wómen and children who have long ago forgotten how to smile. A land equal to the whole continent of Europe except Russia. A land which contains one out of every five people who inhabit the good earth. Geography, the elemental forces which have through aeons fashioned this universe, made this land one—a homogeneous entity as no other country in the world of its size is a homogeneous entity—and puny politics of the moment are trying to cut it asunder into miserable little parcels—sham *stans* where brother will deny his brother and the stranger will batten on all. When human thought is forging ahead towards a world federation, here in Hindostan all the fissiparous bacilli, cultured in race, religion, language, treaties, *sanads* and the shape of your nose, are let loose to devour and destroy the urge of freedom which informs each one of its people.

The land and the people of Hindostan! This ageless land will never die. But each one of its people dies on an average in his twenty-seventh year—in the very prime of life—while the Britisher and the American expect to live for sixty-two years, the German sixty, the New Zealander sixty-seven, the Japanese forty-five ! Even the Chinese, who belong to an equally ancient and teeming land and who are even more subject to the ravages of pestilence and famine, not to talk of civil wars, live longer by eight years than the Indian, who lives under the sheltering, shielding, all-embracing shadow of *Pax Britannica.* The Hindus following their Vedic ancestors always give their youngsters two benedictions: *Shatayur Bhava !* (May you live a hundred years !) to the youth and *Ashtaputra Saubhagyavati Bhava !* (May you be blessed with eight sons !) to the maiden.

The first benediction has become a mockery, while the second has been turned into a curse. We breed like rats and die like flies. Death overtakes 163 out of every 1,000 Indians at the very moment of birth.

The land and the people of Hindostan! The land itself is turned into a huge politico-economic laboratory for empire-builders, while the people lie like guinea-pigs on the table or on the shelf, in various stages of experimentation, retarded development or hot-house growth. That is how feudalism still survives in this country and casts its blighting influence all around, while new ideas find it so difficult to strike root. The guinea-pigs sometimes wonder how long these experiments are going to continue. For 150 years they have been in the laboratory cussed and discussed, analysed and dissected, classified, labelled and indexed and yet their redemption seems to be nowhere near. During the long period they have seen ancient dynasties like the Manchus and the Romanoffs crashing to their doom, and ordinary down-trodden people like themselves rising to power and prosperity. Before their eyes they have seen Japan growing into a world power within a few decades, though in that process it unfortunately leapt straight from feudalism into fascism. Before their very eyes they have seen in Russia centuries telescoped into successive five year plans.

Both Japan and Russia have each in its own way liquidated illiteracy within a few years, raised the standard of living, switched from a purely agricultural to an industrial economy, and recreated and enriched their peoples' lives. Here upon this ancient land the dust of centuries still lies thick. Barely ten out of a hundred Indians can read and write, the percentage for women being still more appalling. The wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a few capitalists in the cities, while the villagers, who consti-

tute 85 per cent of the total population feel lucky if they can get one square meal a day. Industrial expansion proceeds at snail's pace, while the land groans under the burden of supporting an ever-growing population. When it suits their purpose, our rulers can accelerate industrial progress, as has been done during the last five years under the stress of war and in spite of all the difficulties of getting raw material, machine tools and technical guidance. The spurt, however, may prove to be as temporary and illusory as it did during World War I.

Nehru said : "The British seized India's body and possessed her but it was the possession of violence; they did not know her or try to know her. They never looked into her eyes, for theirs were averted and hers downcast through shame and humiliation. After centuries of contact they face each other, strangers still, full of dislike for each other." It seemed for some fleeting weeks at the end of 1929 that Britain and India would at last try to look straight and deep into each other's eyes and through mutual sympathy and understanding become friends. In the political firmament there was the unprecedented conjunction of three planets : a Labour Prime Minister of Britain, a "Christian" Viceroy of India and a large element of national opinion in this country, which had crystallised its demands in the Constitutional Report, prepared by the All-Parties' Committee and generally known as the Nehru Committee Report after its President, the late Pandit Motilal Nehru.

In spite of the first brief experience of the Labour Government in Britain in 1924, hopes again rose high in this country when the second Labour Ministry took office in 1929. Ramsay Macdonald had not then started his trapeze stunts with Stanley Baldwin, and he enjoyed wide reputation as a sincere friend of Indian nationalism, as Sir Stafford Cripps did before 1942. Lord Irwin, who was

appointed Viceroy by a Conservative Government on the strength of his being a regular ridin', huntin' country squire, quickly fell in with the Labour policy of reconciling India —much to the consternation of the Tories. He had come to be known in India as the "Christian" Viceroy and perhaps no other incumbent of his office in this century has enjoyed the personal popularity which Lord Irwin did in spite of the steam-roller of repression he let loose in 1930.

Unfortunately he has lost much of the Indian esteem since he went home, once again changed his name and as Lord Halifax constituted himself the Foreign Minister of Chamberlain and the conscience-keeper of the Cliveden Set. Rude Yankees hailed him as "Holy Fox" and threw rotten eggs at him for the part played by him in Munich, when later on Churchill sent him as Ambassador to Washington. When one considers the contradictions of his career in his three different *Avatars* as Edward Wood, Lord Irwin and Viscount Halifax, one wonders whether there is not something in the science of numerology after all!

During the latter half of 1929 Lord Irwin spent four months in England and took the opportunity of discussing the Indian situation with the Labour Government. The country-wide boycott of the Simon Commission had already revealed that its report would be still-born and no one was more conscious of this than Sir John Simon himself. As a concession to Indian sentiment—and as a face-saving device for himself and his unfortunate colleagues!—he suggested to the Prime Minister "that what might be required, after the reports of the Statutory Commission and the Indian Central Committee have been made, considered and published, but before the stage is reached of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, would be the setting up of a Conference in which His Majesty's Government should meet representatives both of British India and the States, for the purpose of seeking

the greatest possible measure of agreement for the final proposals, which it would later be the duty of His Majesty's Government to submit to Parliament."

This was the seed out of which the triplet of the Round Table Conference was subsequently born. Ramsay Macdonald readily agreed to Simon's proposal and, in order further to placate Indian opinion, authorised the Viceroy on behalf of His Majesty's Government "to state clearly that in their judgment, it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's Constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status."

The announcement was made by Lord Irwin soon after his return from leave, in a long statement which was simultaneously issued in the Commons on the 31st of October 1929. This is the famous Dominion Status declaration which was to prove the bone of contention between the Indian Moderates and the British Diehards for the next six years. Never had an official statement received a warmer response in India than the Dominion Status declaration. It had almost an electrifying effect. Within twenty-four hours of its release, prominent leaders of all parties were in Delhi to discuss it and to devise a common line of action. A Joint Manifesto was issued in which the sincerity underlying the declaration was appreciated and hearty co-operation was offered to Government "in their effort to evolve a scheme of Dominion Status suitable to India's needs." However, the signatories "considered it vital for the success of the proposed conference" that Government (1) adopt a policy of general conciliation, (2) grant an amnesty to political prisoners, (3) secure the effective representation of progressive political organisations, the Indian National Congress getting a predominant representation, (4) and convene the Conference as expeditiously as possible.

Not a single of these recommendations was acted upon

by the Government. On the contrary, in order to allay the storm of protest raised in Parliament by the declaration, Ramsay Macdonald promptly made a strategic retreat by assuring the Commons that Government's policy involved no departure whatever from the preamble of the Government of India Act, 1919, which "stands unchanged unless and until Parliament decides to amend that Act." The Dominion Status declaration, which was supposed to give a new deal to India, was thus sabotaged in spirit, if not in letter, almost before its ink had dried.

Jubilation gave place to consternation, hope to indignation, in the ranks of the Indian political leaders. They felt scandalised and shocked by Macdonald's barefaced exhibition of taking away with the left hand what was given with the right. It provided one more illustration—more outrageous than all the others because it was given by the self-declared friends of India, the Labour Party—of breaking to the heart the words of promise uttered to the ear. Whatever hopes were created in India that the declaration would usher a new era in Indo-British relations were dashed to the ground. It was true that even that time the words "Dominion Status" were suspect in the eyes of the younger Congressmen. Already talking in terms of Complete Independence, they were in no way enamoured of the declaration made by Lord Irwin and when Macdonald and Wedgewood Benn, Secretary of State for India, began their ingenuous attempts to explain away its implications in Britain, even those who had signed the Joint Manifesto felt chagrined and embittered.

Attempts were made to present a united front and an All Parties meeting was called at Allahabad on the 16th of November. The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress was to meet there simultaneously. Jawaharlal Nebru and Subhash Chandra Bose, however, resigned

from the Working Committee in protest, as they were not prepared to touch the diluted Dominion Status with a barge-pole. The one year ultimatum given by the Calcutta session of the Congress to the British Government to accept the Constitution prepared by the All Parties Committee, failing which the Congress would revive the non-violent non-cooperation movement, was to expire within a few weeks' time and the younger Congressmen were not prepared to be side-tracked from the path chalked out at Calcutta by the distant mirage of Dominion Status. Even the elder Nehru was incensed by the Labour Government's attempt to paint a picture "which made it look like Swarajya to India but British Raj to England."

Lord Irwin made a last minute effort to win nationalist support. He particularly desired that the Congress should co-operate with the Round Table Conference. A meeting was accordingly arranged on the 23rd of December at the Viceroy's House—the very day on which a bomb exploded under the Viceregal train. Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Sapru and Jinnah were present. After a good deal of sympathetic talk about the bomb outrage, Gandhi demanded an assurance from the Viceroy (as a condition precedent to Congress co-operation) that the forthcoming Round Table Conference should proceed on the basis of Dominion Status. Lord Irwin would not, however, go beyond the four corners of the declaration and was not in a position to commit His Majesty's Government in any way. He was not authorised to extend an invitation to the Round Table Conference with any definite promise of Dominion Status.

That interview at the Viceroy's House marked the parting of ways between the Government and the Congress. It is true that the Madras Congress, held in the last week of 1927, had passed a resolution to the effect that "This Congress declares the goal of the Indian people to be complete

National Independence." But the very fact that the next Congress held in Calcutta based its ultimatum to the British Government on the Nehru Report proves that Indian public opinion that time was, by and large, content to visualise its future as a free and equal member of the British Commonwealth. It was not taken in by the specious argument that "Dominion Status is already in action," which was being raised by the Labour Government on the strength of India's ceremonial participation (which really meant the presence of a loyal *jo-hukum* nominee of Whitehall) at various Imperial and International Conferences. But if Ramsay Macdonald had taken courage in both hands and offered a square deal of Dominion Status to India, events would not have taken the turn they did at Lahore.

Gandhi himself was a slow convert to the independence creed, not because he did not cherish the privilege of India being absolutely free to manage her own affairs, internal and external, but because he did not desire a violent departure from the past. One step was enough for him. Constitutional pandits both in India and Britain were that time busy stressing the theme that Dominion Status of the Westminster variety implicitly conferred the right of secession. If it were really so and if the Labour Government were prepared to proceed with the Round Table Conference on the basis of Dominion Status, Gandhi would have surely persuaded the Lahore Congress to hold the ultimatum in abeyance and to co-operate with the Government and other parties in framing the constitution, in spite of the bitter opposition which such a proposal would have evoked from men like Nehru and Bose, who were straining at the leash.

Indeed for many years after the Congress had hitched its wagon to the star of independence at Lahore, Gandhi hugged the hope to his bosom that Britain would do the right thing by India and thus enable the two countries to

march together in free and equal comradeship. All his early associations and beliefs, his very philosophy of non-violence, counselled him to take the course which was least fraught with danger to the fabric of Indo-British relations. Gandhi has a passionate faith in historic continuity, in the evolutionary process of life, in the essential goodness of mankind. He was loath—he struggled to the last against his dearest associates—to cut asunder the ties that bound India and Britain for 150 long years.

Let it be recorded in history that the man who was to dumbfound the world by the two terrible words *Quit India*, addressed to Britain in 1942 in the midst of a life-and-death global conflict, was the last—the very last among Indian nationalists—to advise India to quit Britain. Long after the Congress had irrevocably pledged itself to complete independence, long after even the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha had followed the Congress footsteps and passed similar resolutions, long after Britain had irrefutably proved that India could never aspire under her aegis to be a Dominion of the Westminster variety, by clamping upon her the hybrid and reactionary Government of India Act of 1935, Gandhi continued to toy with the thought of Dominion Status for India, as he confessed in a letter to Mr. H. S. Polak in February 1937. When the disillusion came at long last, it burst with a shattering, almost seismic, force whose shock was felt all over the world.

It was implicit in the Independence Resolution passed at the Lahore Congress that a struggle would be launched immediately for its attainment. The first exhibition of the temper in the country was given by the celebration of the Independence Day on the 26th of January 1930, when millions of people all over the country solemnly affirmed their faith in *Purna Swarajya* or Complete Independence for India. Ever since then, through peace and war, storm and

stress, the 26th of January is being observed every year as the Independence Day.

Soon after, Gandhi framed what are known as the eleven national demands—which were illustrative rather than comprehensive—and urged upon Government to satisfy them if it was really anxious for Congress participation in the Round Table Conference. This makes it clear that notwithstanding the Lahore Resolution, he was still thinking in terms of co-operation with the British Government. In February, formal authority was given to him by the All-India Congress Committee to start the Civil Disobedience Movement and on the 2nd of March, Gandhi sent his famous letter to Lord Irwin with a special messenger—a young Englishman named Reginald Reynolds. The letter dwelt upon the fairness of the eleven demands and appealed to the Viceroy to fulfil them. This letter was what may be termed the final ultimatum, though Gandhi called it "a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister."

The reply was prompt, curt and unequivocal. His Excellency regretted that Mr. Gandhi should have been "contemplating a course of action which was clearly bound to involve the violation of the law and danger to the public peace!" This was all that Reginald Reynold got out of his journey. "On bended knees," rejoined Gandhi, "I asked for bread and received a stone instead. The English nation responds only to force and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply. The only public peace the nation knows is the peace of the public prison. India is a vast prison-house. I repudiate this (British) Law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of compulsory peace that is choking the nation for want of free vent."

This marked the declaration of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the first scene of which was enacted in Gandhi's historic 24-day march to Dandi, which started from Ahmeda-

bad on the 12th of March. Those who had forgotten what they had read in their childhood about the Boston Tea Party ridiculed the spectacle of a frail, old man setting out at the head of his 79 Khadi-clad followers for the distant sea-shore in order to manufacture salt. It was a quixotic way indeed of giving battle to the greatest empire in history. The Government itself ignored the march at the beginning, in the hope that it would peter out by its very absurdity. But when its echoes began to reverberate throughout the length and breadth of the country and when Gandhi, after himself technically breaking the law by picking up salt from the Dandi sea-shore, sounded the war-drum for similar action elsewhere, he was at last arrested and detained in the Yerawada prison without trial.

Soon salt became as symbolic in the struggle for Indian freedom as tea was a century and a half ago in the war of American Independence. There were other items of the Civil Disobedience Movement like the boycott of British goods, which affected British interests far more adversely, but somehow the breaking of salt laws became the most popular and spectacular aspect of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The mass raids on the Government salt stores at Dharasana, Wadala, and Sanikatha fired public imagination-and invited police brutality—as nothing else could. Here is a description of the Dharasana salt raid by Webb Miller, the celebrated American correspondent:

"In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable Civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of the volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violence creed."

The movement spread like prairie fire. Within the twinkling of an eye the country was set aflame from end to end. Mammoth processions, which were taken out to protest against this or that order or arrest, invariably ended in broken heads and the *lathi* (hefty bamboo stick) became more useful to the powers-that-be than the law. Frenquently shooting was resorted to and one of the bloodiest scenes of this type was enacted at Peshawar, the capital of the Frontier Province, while Sholapur, a district town in Bombay Presidency, passed under martial law altogether. Picketing of godowns and shops had brought trade in British merchandise to a virtual standstill, while the jails were overflowing with thousands of prisoners, men and women, young and old. In Gujerat and Karnatak whole villages were evacuated in the no-tax campaign and ancestral plots of lands—the sole support of the peasantry—were forfeited and auctioned for even less than the proverbial song by the district officials.

Never before in history were the land and the people of Hindostan in deeper, more widespread, longer sustained ferment—ferment at white heat—than they were in the early thirties. The land was lit with a thousand bonfires and beacons and the 400 million of people were standing at bay, bent upon exercising their inherent, inalienable right of living like free men and women.

This was the land and these the people of Hindostan whom, impelled by the turn in his career and following the behest of his father, Winston Churchill proceeded to guard and save for Britain—as irony would have it!—at this very supreme moment in Hindostan's history. The world was to witness a demonstration in the political field of the old conundrum of physics: What happens when an irresistible force hits an immovable object?

The riddle remains unsolved yet—as in physics, so in politics!

CHAPTER IX

SEVEN INDIAN PILLARS

WHEN Churchill took the threads of India in his hand in 1929, the India he visualised was not the India of 1929 but of 1899, the year in which he had bid her good-bye as a subaltern. It was like a ghost returning to its earthly tabernacle expecting everything to remain exactly as it was during its human existence. He could not believe that a mere thirty years could leave any imprint upon the eternal, unchanging East.

May be Japan had become a world power almost overnight and that China was heroically undergoing the prolonged birth-pangs of a revolution. But surely India, secure under the protecting wings of Britain, would be content with its wonted ways. Three decades could not surely alter the pattern of a thousand years. He was no doubt vaguely disturbed by the tumult and the shouting at Lahore but before his mind's eye always rose the shady, peaceful avenues of Bangalore; the prancing polo ponies; the salaaming menials; the tournament triumphs at Hyderabad and Meerut; the flash of the sword and the fleeting glimpse of the burly Pathan on the Frontier. If eternity deserved to remain transfixed anywhere, it was in India.

Had not his favourite Macaulay told him that "India now is like Europe in the fifth century"? A century had passed since these words were penned and he recalled how his philosopher friend, John Morley, had amplified the essayist's remark: "For us to preside over the transition from the fifth European century in some parts, in slow uneven stages, up to the 20th—so that you have before you all the centuries at once as it were—to preside over that, and to be the guide of peoples in that condition is.....one

of the most glorious tasks ever confided to any powerful state in the history of civilized mankind." [1] Churchill was willing in his own way to bear the burden of this glorious task and to perform a few juggling tricks with Old Man Time.

To begin with, he blandly declared to an audience in London : "The facts of India have not changed. They are immemorial ! The political classes of India are a mere handful compared to the population. The Western ideas they have gathered and reproduced have no relation whatever to. the life and thought of India. The vast majority can neither read nor write."[2]

This was pillar number one in Churchill's Indian edifice. It follows from this that the educated class, "the unpractised, unproved, unrepresentative, self-chosen groups of Indian politicians"[3] had no right to speak on behalf of the Indian masses. He heaped ridicule upon Brahmins (probably in the belief that all political leaders in India, including Gandhi, were drawn from that caste !)—" those Brahmins who mouth and patter the principles of Western Liberalism and pose as philosophic and democratic politicians," who " begin chopping logic with John Stuart Mill, or pleading the rights of man with Jean Jacques Rousseau."[4] "To abandon India to the rule of the Brahmins would be an act of cruel and wicked negligence. It would shame for ever those who bore its guilt." [5]

Those Brahmins and other political busybodies who were proving a thorn in Britain's side should be plucked out relentlessly. What if they sacrificed their very lives for the amelioration of their down-trodden brothers and sisters ! It is only the British coming from 5,000 miles away who could in all conscience claim to be the trustees of the masses, according to Churchill. " We have, therefore, a supreme

1 Morley *Indian Speeches* pp. 96-97 2 Churchill *India* pp. 39-40
3 *Ibid.* p. 124 4 *Ibid.* pp. 125-26 5 *Ibid.* pp. 125-26

moral duty to discharge to the Indian people. We have no right whatever to hand them over to a comparatively small and utterly unrepresentative political faction, to be the prey of misgovernment, of deterioration in every public service, of a religious bigotry of a kind not dreamed of for generations in the West, and finally of civil war. While we have strength, we must discharge our duty. Neither taunts nor blandishments should move us from it. When we can no longer discharge our duty, then our reign in India is done, and many other great things in the history of the British Empire will come to their close at the same time."[1]

This great moral responsibility for the welfare of the Indian peoples, who were being exploited by the men of the type of Tagore and Iqbal, Gandhi and Nehru weighed heavily upon the mind of Churchill. "The Indian Congress and other elements in this agitation represent neither the numbers, the strength nor the virtue of the Indian people. They merely represent those Indians who acquired a veneer of Western civilization, and have read all those books about democracy *which Europe is now beginning increasingly to discard*.....It would be altogether wrong to entrust the welfare of the great masses to the Indian political classes. That would not be "India for the Indians"; that would only be India for some Indians, that would only be India for a very few Indians. Undoubtedly any such abrogation on our part of our duty would mean that the Indian peoples would be exploited, oppressed and cast down in the scale of the world's affairs as the proletariat of China is cast down in misery to day."[2]

There can be nothing better than the existing arrangement. "At present the Government of India is responsible to the British Parliament, which is the oldest, the least unwise and the most democratic parliament in the world.

1. *India* p. 78 2. *Ibid.* pp. 96-97

To transfer that responsibility to this highly artificial and restricted oligarchy of Indian politicians would be a retrograde act. It would be a shameful act. It would be an act of cowardice, desertion and dishonour. It would bring grave material evils, both upon India and Great Britain ; but it would bring upon Great Britain a moral shame which would challenge for ever the reputation of the British Empire as a valiant and benignant force in the history of mankind. "[1]

Churchill has a great faith in "the small number of white officials who have no personal interests of their own to serve, who are quite impartial between race and race and who have built up in 150 years an organisation which has given the enormous masses peace, justice and a substantial increase in material well-being," [2] and "who have for generations presided over the development of India." "If that authority is injured or destroyed, the whole efficiency of the services.....will perish with it. India will fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into the barbarism and the privations of the Middle Ages. The question at stake is not therefore the gratification of the political aspirations towards self-government of a small number of intellectuals. ..... To let the Indian people fall, as they would, to the level of China, would be a desertion of duty on the part of Great Britain." [3]

Read that last sentence again and note the contempt Churchill then entertained for China. That country indeed was the ultimate standard of degradation in Churchill's eye. Again and again in his speeches during those years he painted the plight of the Chinese people as the danger signal to India. To let the Indian people fall to the level of China—what a shame would it be ! Today Churchill no longer refers to China in such slighting terms. Within a decade China has become the great and equal ally of Britain and America

1 *India* p. 97 2 *Ibid.* p. 77 3 *Ibid.* p. 125

playing in the East the same role *vis-a-vis* Japan which Russia is playing against Germany in the West. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek is hailed as a world figure by the British Prime Minister. Where is India and her leaders today ? Perhaps it would have been better for them and for the world at large if they had not been saved by Churchill and had gone the way of China in the thirties.

The third great pillar of Churchillian wisdom was that there is neither Indian unity nor an Indian nation. Not even two Indian nations, Mr. Jinnah ! "India is a continent nearly as large as Europe, and, like Europe, it has now between three and four hundred millions of people. There are scores of nations and races in India and hundreds of religions and sects." [1] Again, "It is the commonest fallacy of present discussions to speak of India as if it were the home of a strongly-coherent united race. It makes me sick when I hear the Secretary of State saying of India, '*She* will do this and *she* will do that.' India is an abstraction, represented by a handful of politically-minded classes who have no means of intercourse with each other except in the English language, who have no real contact with the masses, who are incapable of giving them the guidance they require, and are animated in the main by very great hostility to this country. India is no more a political personality than Europe. India is a geographical term. *It is no more a united nation than the Equator.*" [2]

In this abstraction called India, Churchill could detect only one concrete reality—that the scores of nations and races were always flying at each other's throat ! This was his fourth pillar. He had made the great discovery that "there are at least seventy (*sic*) different races and even more numerous religions and sects in India, many of them in a state of antagonism." [3] In this con-

1. *India* p. 77 2. *Ibid.* p. 136 3 *Ibid.* p. 40

nection he frequently invoked a pronouncement of his great father. Lord Randolph Churchill had said in 1885 : " Our rule in India is, as it were, a sheet of oil spread out over the surface of, and keeping calm and quiet and unruffled by storms, an immense and profound ocean of humanity. Underneath that rule lie hidden all the memories of fallen dynasties, all the traditions of vanquished races, all the pride of insulted creeds." [1]

In the true Imperialist tradition, Churchill took every opportunity in Parliament and outside to allude to, to harp upon, to magnify and even subtly to incite the communal and other differences in the Indian body politic. " While the Hindu elaborates his argument, the Muslim sharpens his sword. Between these two races and creeds, containing as they do so many gifted and charming beings in all the glory of youth, there is no inter-marriage. The gulf is impassable." [2] One wonders if Churchill ever learnt that Jinnah's daughter has married a Christian and Nehru's a Parsi !

And now listen to this lurid description which would have delighted the heart of Macaulay : " If you took the antagonisms of France and Germany, and the antagonisms of Catholics and Protestants, and compounded them and multiplied them ten-fold, you would not equal the division, which separates these two races (Hindu and Muslim) intermingled by scores of millions in the cities and plains of India. But over both of them the impartial rule of Britain has hitherto lifted its appeasing sceptre." [3]

Churchill seems to have never been called upon by his spell-bound audiences to explain how the two races failed, in the centuries before the British stepped on the scene, to exterminate each other ! Nor could he have known that in

1 Churchill *Lord Randolph Churchill* Vol. I p. 380
2 *India*. p. 126-7 3 *Ibid*. p. 127

the numerous dynastic wars in India, Muslims often fought for Hindu kings while many Hindu chieftains prided upon their loyalty to the Moghul throne in Delhi. There never has been a purely Hindu-Muslim war in Indian history, except under " the appeasing sceptre of the British " during the last few years.

The fifth pillar of Churchill was that the British have not merely duties and responsibilities to the Indian masses but enjoy certain definite and overriding rights for themselves. He observed in the House of Commons on the 26th of January 1931 : " After all, there are British rights and interests in India. Two centuries of effort and achievement, lives given on a hundred fields, far more lives given and consumed in faithful and devoted service to the Indian people themselves. All this has earned us rights of our own in India. "

He frequently stressed these rights and he amplified them four years later as follows : " We are no more aliens in India than the Mohamedans and the Hindus themselves. We have as good a right to be in India as any of them except perhaps the Depressed classes, who are the original stock. Our Government is not an irresponsible government. It is a government responsible to the crown and to the Parliament. It is incomparably the best Government that India has ever seen or ever will see. "

He returned later on in the speech to the same topic ; " We hope once and for all to kill the idea that the British in India are aliens moving, with many apologies, out of the country as soon as they have been able to set up any kind of governing organism to take their place. We shall try to inculcate the idea that we are there for ever as honoured partners with our Indian fellow subjects, whom we invite in all faithfulness to join with us in the highest functions of Government for their lasting benefit *and for our own.*" [1]

1 *Hansard* Vol. 297 Columns 1649&1663

This was the 1935 version of the 1942 *We hold our own !* and this postulate runs like a thread throughout Churchill's career of fifty years and gives it a cohesion which it otherwise lacks. The subaltern of the nineties and the Prime Minister of the forties meet on the common ground of India. Again and again he has rubbed it in upon the Indian people that Britain will never quit India.

"It must be made plain that the British nation has no intention of relinquishing its mission in India, or of failing in its duty to the Indian masses, or of parting with its supreme control in any of the essentials of peace, order and good government. We have no intention of casting away that most truly bright and precious jewel in the crown of the King, which more than all our other Dominions and Dependencies constitutes the glory and the strength of the British Empire." [1] He has frequently developed this theme in the Commons. Here is a sample (January 26, 1931,): "For thirty years I have watched from a central position the manifestations of the will power of Great Britain, and I do not believe our people will consent to be edged, pushed, talked and cozened out of India."

Nor does Churchill merely indulge in sanctimonious platitudes about Britain's mission in India and her moral responsibility to the Indian masses. He realizes very well India's mission to Britain and the utilitarian value of the Indian masses to the British classes, too. That is the great saving grace abont Winston Churchill. When he is really in a fighting mood, he blurts out the raw truth without any frills or furbelows. He declared in 1930 : "*The loss of India would mark and consummate the downfall of the British Empire. That great organism would pass at a stroke out of life into history.*" [2]

Here is another and grimmer warning he gave to the

1 *India* p. 47 2 *Ibid.*

British people: "The loss of India, however arising, would be final and fatal to us. It could not fail to be part of a process which would reduce us to the scale of a minor Power. Holland, once our equal, was outmatched in the world in spite of all her sturdy domestic strength, and became a small continental state. But Holland suffered this eclipse without having acquired the population of a modern first-class State. We have forty-five millions in this island, a very large proportion of whom are in existence because of our world position, economic, political, imperial. If, guided by counsels of madness and cowardice disguised as false benevolence, you troop home from India, you will leave behind you what John Morley called 'a bloody chaos'; and you will find famine to greet you on the horizon on your return."[1]

This is the seventh and central pillar on which the Churchillian edifice rests. Britain's moral responsibility to India is the glittering facade to dazzle the world and hoodwink even the Indians. The real foundation of British rule in India lies in the latter's material utility to Britain.

CHAPTER X
ON THE SPOT

THE seven Indian pillars of Churchill had neither a Grecian symmetry nor a Roman grandeur about them. They were rather like the apparently imposing but far from inspiring colonnades which greet the visitor to New Delhi. Rows and rows of them leading to nowhere.

It would be easy for any person with a little knowledge of logic and a fair sense of justice to demolish a struc-

1 Speech at Free Trade Hall, Manchester, January 30, 1931.

ture supported by such jerry-built pillars. And in fact during the six years of what I may call Churchill's Indian interlude (from 1929 to 1935), the structure was so riddled with shot and shell by Englishmen and Indians, by foe and friend, from the left and right and even the centre, that little was left of it except the few square feet on which its irrepressible owner-builder stood defiantly. Never has Winston Churchill's career, packed with adventure and achievement, been so full of frustration—unrelieved frustration —as it was during the years 1929 to 1935.

Even his worst enemies cannot withold their admiration, however, for the sheer bull-dog tenacity with which Churchill fought for India, i. e. for keeping India safe for Britain. From the first moment when Ramsay Macdonald, the Labour Premier, made the Dominion Status declaration on October 31, 1929, to the last when the India Bill was successfully piloted through its third reading in the House of Commons by Sir Samuel Hoare, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, on June 5, 1935, and the curtain finally fell down on the Indian scene, Churchill struggled unceasingly against what he condemned as the policy of surrender.

To begin with, he had good reason to be profoundly upset by Macdonald's announcement. It did not hurt so much that the Labour Government should start some such madcap stunt. It was fully expected of them and that is why Lord Birkenhead had taken such care to appoint the Simon Commission two years before its due time, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. But he could hardly believe his eyes when he saw those two faithful, the Liberal Sir John Simon and the Tory Lord Irwin, themselves walking into the parlour of the Labour Premier. It was Sir John Simon's suggestion which was seized upon by the new Government as the excuse for calling the

Round Table Conference, while Lord Irwin turned himself into a willing mouthpiece of Macdonald.

No wonder both Birkenhead, the god-father of the Commission, and Churchill, who was to be in *loco parentis* to it after the former's death, felt outraged by the turn of events. They refused to be mollified by Macdonald's assurance that the declaration involved no change of policy, even though it was accepted by Baldwin, the leader of the Opposition, and the majority of the Conservative Party. Birkenhead roundly condemned every word said in Britain on India, before the publication of the Commission's Report, as a treachery to its authority: "Nobody knew whether the Simon Commission was prepared to recommend Dominion Status. But everyone who believed reasonably in their sanity knew that that could not be!" Churchill on his part delivered a solemn warning (in his aforementioned article in the *Daily Mail*) to Macdonald's Government against abusing in any way "our confidence in so grave a matter."

He proceeded: "It is the duty of public men and political parties to make it plain without delay that the extension of Dominion Status to India is not practicable at the present time and that any attempt to secure it will encounter the earnest resistance of the British nation.....The idea that Home Rule for India or Dominion Status can emerge from anything that is now being done or inquired into, is not only fantastic in itself but criminally mischievous in its effects." He concluded on the ringing peroration: "Against the perpetration of such a crime as the immediate grant of Dominion Status, it is necessary without delay to marshal the sober and resolute forces of the British Empire, and thus preserve the life and welfare of all the peoples of Hindostan."

This he proceeded to do with the typical Churchillian

fervour. He concentrated all his energies and abilities, his oratorical gifts and his parliamentary finesse, his skill as an organiser and as a wire-puller, on a single issue—India—which became the one dominating preoccupation of his public life. To the crusader's burning zeal was soon added the crusader's blind bigotry. Indeed, so completely and violently did he identify himself with the cause of keeping India safe for Britain, that it gradually grew almost into a pathological obsession with him. We have it on the authority of Vincent Sheean, who used to meet him frequently in those days, that in 1935 when all his opposition had gone for naught with the passage of the Government of India Act, "Churchill would not speak to his old colleagues and friends if they had been in favour of even the most modest constitutional reform in India."[1]

For five and a half years he conducted a raging, tearing campaign against the hideous crime of the Dominion Status declaration. Against Ramsay Macdonald and Irwin, and later against Stanley Baldwin and Sir Samuel Hoare. Against the Socialist "mismanagement and depredation" and the Conservative complacence and prodigality. Against "the viewy hysterical megalomania of the Round Table Conference." Against the White Paper, which was "a draft for Britain's abdication of its sacred duties and rights in India." "It is a paradox, an elaborate grimace." Against the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee, which was "a sort of recruiting agency for the supporters of the Bill"—"not a committee of inquiry, but a mutual admiration society." Against the Government of India Bill, which was "a gigantic quilt of jumbled crochet work," as also "a monstrous monument of sham built by pigmies." And, of course, against the Indian National Congress "which burnt the Union Jack at Lahore" and against Gandhi whose very name was anathema !

1. *Between the Thunder And the Sun* p. 42

Though it was ultimately to prove a cry in the wilderness, Churchill's voice never failed or faltered or died on the echo. Now it was hushed in simulated accents of doom if India were lost to Britain. Now it sneered in scorn and ridicule against his adversaries. Now it quivered with indignation and invective against the Indian rebels who were demanding freedom. Now it lashed in fury against the policy of defeatism followed by the British public leaders.

And again and again it rose to a crescendo of stirring appeal to his fellow-Britons not to sign away their title-deeds of the greatest empire in history : " India is no ordinary question of party politics. It is one of those supreme issues which come upon us from time to time. When they arise, the men and women who faithfully guard the life of Britain and her Empire in every rank and employment, in every part of the country, feel the same vibration. They felt it on August 4, 1914. They felt it in the General Strike. They feel it now. "[1]

Unfortunately for Churchill, they did not, in spite of the applause he received. Their national phlegm remained unruffled. Churchill's lurid picture of the doom that would overtake Britain because of a certain declaration made by Ramsay Macdonald—which he had duly and promptly explained away !—did not make their flesh creep. They knew their Mac and also their Winston. Secretly they rather pitied the former, who was beating his ineffectual wings in the void, and they laughed in their sleeve at the latter's incurable propensity for mistaking a coffee-house brawl for a bloody revolution. Besides, it was absurd to suggest that the Labour Government, which was in office but not in power, would dare to write off India in sheer Socialistic cussedness.

1 Speech before the Council of the West Essex Conservative Association, February 23, 1931.

Apparently it took Churchill a long time to realize this sober fact. And when he did, he was much too far gone to retrace his steps. Whatever may be the mixed motives, which first impelled Churchill to take up the Indian issue (as discussed in an earlier chapter), the Indian issue itself gradually became an *idee fixe* with him. Instead of being hailed as a prophet, he soon found that he was heading to become a martyr! All his fears were being dismissed as delusions and his appeals to save India fell mostly on deaf ears.

Nothing seemed to shake or break that "boneless wonder" Ramsay Macdonald, who was extricating himself from all promises and predicaments with consummate ease and success. Baldwin on his part had kept too strong a hand on the party machine for Churchill to hope even for a remote chance to seize its control. And worst of all both those extremes were from the very beginning showing signs of coming together—the first meeting-ground being provided by India itself! The muse of irony which was to mock Churchill for ten long years first revealed her hand in this manner.

Churchill took his stand on the Act of 1919, which is "a rock that cannot be removed", and on the Report of the Statutory Commission, which scrupulously and pointedly avoided the phrase "Dominion Status" and thus justified the trust reposed in it by those who called it into being. "By that Act we conferred great new constitutional powers upon the Indian political classes and we pledged to extend those constitutional powers honourably and perseveringly...*But by the same Act we reserved to ourselves an equal right to restrict, delay or, if need be, for a spell to reverse the process.*" Like the old lady in the song who wanted to sweep back the Atlantic with her broom, to the end Churchill entertained the hope

that he could restore India to the maternal autocracy of his father's days. But, unlike the old lady, he has !

The Simon Commission Report, which was published in 1930, was considered by Churchill to be the sole foundation for the joint treatment of the Indian problem by the three British parties. "Once that report has been put on one side, as it has been almost contemptuously by the Socialist Government, it is imperative that the Conservative Party should recover the fullest possible liberty of judgment."[1] This was, of course, a direct challenge to Baldwin, who had promised to co-operate with Macdonald on the Indian issue. Churchill could not accept "the suggestion that we ought to keep India out of party politics, if it only means we are going to lose India with decorum and dignity. To lose India would be far worse than to bring it into party politics."[2] "The unity of all parties upon a policy dictated by the Socialist Government would, in my opinion, be worse even than disunity of parties upon the Indian question."[3]

This did not in any way mean that Churchill had loyally accepted all the recommendations of the Simon Commission. On the contrary, he thought that it went "further than many of us would care to go in some respects." Later on he roundly declared in the Commons: "I would have been glad if the Simon Commission had reported, in view of the lack of co-operation of the Congress, that no further advance was justified at the present time."[4] Churchill, however, looked at the Report through his own spectacles and on one occasion Major Attlee, who was a member of the Commission, was constrained to remark that

1 Speech at Winchester House, Feb. 23, 1931
2 ,, ,, Constitutional Club, March 26, 1931
3 ,, House of Commons, March 12, 1931
4 *Hansard.* 297-1656

he found a great difficulty in recognizing his own offspring through the glasses of Churchill !

Churchill never lost an opportunity of assailing the Dominion Status declaration " which was uncalled for, was an interruption of the procedure prescribed by law and was an intervention between Parliament and their Commission. " Churchill dismissed Dominion Status for India as " an ultimate visionary goal "—a goal which has no chance of " being reached in our lifetime, or in any period which it is profitable for us to consider. " He brusquely pushed aside all analogies between the self-governing Dominions and India.

" Dominion Status like that of Canada or Australia is not going to happen in India in any period which we can remotely foresee. " " Nothing of this sort is possible in India ; nothing of this kind is contemplated in India, not even by the most forward Member of the present Government. "[1] " Underneath the smooth platitudes and euphemisms of Western democratic politics and all this airy Round Table talk, the actual process of governing India has been tardily but rigorously carried on. "[2]

Before long it became obvious that India was not the " open sesame " to the leadership of the Conservative Party and, much less, to the consequent Premiership when the party might return to power. On the contrary, Churchill's own position in the inner counsels of the party was proving far from happy. His differences with Baldwin on the Indian issue soon came to head and he decided to burn all boats behind him by resigning from the Conservative shadow Cabinet in February 1931.

Not only that but he informed the Party Council of his constituency : " I should not be able to serve in any administration about whose Indian policy I was not reassured."

1 *India* p. 65 2 Speech in London, Dec. 12, 1930

He reiterated his determination the following month at the Constitutional Club : "I wish to make it perfectly clear I am going to attack the Socialist record and policy in India. Nothing will turn me from it, and I have cheerfully and gladly put out of my mind all idea of public office. I intend to fight this question during the next two or three years, in which it will be the culminating issue in British politics, without regard to any aspect but the merits."

Churchill gradually began to find himself a lone wolf whether in the Party, Parliament or the general public. Only confirmed reactionaries flocked under his "Save India for Britain" standard. The death of Birkenhead deprived Churchill of a comrade who was even more obscurantist—as far as India was concerned—than himself. The Colonel Blimps and such other diehards who associated with him gave him loyal support, but they were more of a liability than a help to him in the resurrection of his political fortunes. Nevertheless he found a useful propaganda instrument in the "Indian Empire Society", founded by a number of ex-Governors of Indian provinces, of which he became the patron saint and under whose auspices he stumped the country for his "Save India for Britain" campaign. The most valuable support he got was from the Rothermere Press.

Churchill was undaunted by his failure to convince any front-ranker about the justice of his cause. He observed in this connection : "I am told I am alone among men who have held high public office in this country in the view I take about the Indian policy. If that were so it would be a great honour for me, because I should be left alone to plead a majestic cause, and I should be left alone to represent the opinions of many millions of British men and women in every party who are deeply concerned at the trend of events in the East. If I am alone, I am going to

receive shortly an ally—a very powerful ally—an ally whom I dread—an ally with a sombre title—his title is *THE MARCH OF EVENTS.* The march of events in India will be grim and may possibly be rapid."[1]

The method Churchill adopted to plead his "majestic cause" cannot be said to have been in any way majestic. He plunged himself into the controversy with a reckless abandon and his pronouncements of those days hardly sound at this distance of time as if they emanated from an Elder Statesman—which Churchill had already become then—who had adorned high offices of state for a quarter of a century ! The lesser the support he could muster, the more unrestrained became his propaganda.

As Sir Herbert Samuel observed in a memorable debate in the Commons: "Churchill left no stone unturned: one might almost say that he left no stone unthrown !" Like Big Bertha, he hurled his shells across five thousand miles against "the Indian revolutionaries," even against Lord Irwin who was "dangling the orb of power before the gleaming eyes of excitable millions and before the powerful forces of implacable hostility with whom we have, as is well known, to cope in India."[2] He fought pitched battles against the Labour Government on the floor of the Commons, where he has always been a host in himself. And finally in the camp of his own Party, he began a guerilla warfare against its leader.

There is a contemporary cartoon by Low in which Churchill is depicted as a typical Chicago gangster, staging a frame-up with his associates to shoot Mr. Baldwin. The occasion was provided by a fierce by-election in London, which was contested by two Tory candidates on the Indian issue. The caption of the cartoon reads: *On the Spot*—the spot being India—*The 'bumping off' of Mr. Baldwin*

1. *India* pp. 135-136 2. *Ibid.* pp. 55-6

for his Indian policy. Mr. Churchill (Cigarface) in the taxi. Cigarface is firing the tommy-gun in his hand, while his fellow-gangsters are shown strategically disposed all around, simultaneously firing their revolvers at the unfortunate victim, who is collapsing to the ground. Low has thus exquisitely preserved for posterity a phase in Churchill's career which he fain would forget.

CHAPTER XI

THE MARCH OF EVENTS

THE March of Events, which Churchill hailed as "an ally with a sombre title," had meanwhile begun. In India it was known as the March of Dandi. And in the end it hardly proved an ally of Churchill!

He quickly diagnosed the political situation in India: "When Mr. Gandhi went to the seashore, he was not looking for salt; he was looking for trouble. He was looking for means of flouting the Government and compelling them to arrest him."[1] Churchill was right and, *by Jingo!* Churchill did fight against the policy of vacillation and temporising, "blarney and palaver," negotiations and concessions followed by the Socialist Government and the Viceroy. The root of all the trouble was of course the Dominion Status Declaration. He attributed the patriotic upsurge in India entirely to that announcement.

"There was au enormous leap forward in the demands of the Indian political classes. What had been accepted before was now brushed aside. Moderate men adopted opinions which hitherto had been considered extreme.

1 House of Commons March 12, 1931.

Outbreaks of disorder and lawlessness occurred in many parts of India, culminating in the Nationalist Congress at Lahore, at which the British flag was insulted with every circumstance of formality and publicity, and I may add, insulted with impunity."[1] "If, instead of raising alluring hopes of speedy Dominion Status, we had concentrated upon practical steps to advance the material conditions of the Indian masses; if the Congress at Lahore which burnt the Union Jack had been broken up forthwith and its leaders deported; if Gandhi had been arrested and tried as soon as he broke the law; if the will to rule had been firmly asserted, there would have been no necessity for the immense series of penal measures which have, in fact, been taken."[2]

Churchill was a firm believer in the doctrine—"a punch on the nose and no nonsense." "In dealing with Oriental races for whose well-being you are responsible, it is a mistake to try to gloss over grave differences, to try to dress up proposals in an unwarrantably favourable guise, to ignore or to conceal or to put in the background rugged but unpleasant facts. The right course on the contrary is to state soberly and firmly what the British position is, and not be afraid to say 'this would not suit us', 'that would not be good for you', 'there is no chance of this coming to pass', 'we shall not agree to that being done.' All these plain negatives ought to be stated frankly and plainly so that false hopes are not excited unduly and lead to disappointment and reproaches."[3]

Churchill did not spare Lord Irwin from the chastisement which he was showering upon the Socialist Government. In the beginning he spoke more in pity than in wrath. When the Dominion Status announcement was made, he thought that "it is all the more due to the Viceroy that

1 House of Commons January 26, 1931. 2 *India* p. 43
3 *Ibid* p. 91

he should be protected from the measureless evils of a misunderstanding of his words in India." But it was soon made clear that Lord Irwin was acting as much out of his own volition as under instructions from Whitehall and that he was in no need of Churchill's sympathy. The latter's criticism gradually became more caustic. Lord Irwin was accused of "proceeding upon a wrong mental theme—his attitude towards India has throughout been an apology. He has not shown sufficient confidence in the indispensable work which our country has done, and is doing for India, or in British resolution that it shall not be interrupted or destroyed."[1]

But when it suited the occasion, Churchill did not hesitate to go to the other extreme and to accuse Lord Irwin of the excessive use of force, thus rivalling the capacity of a certain nameless gentleman of blowing hot and cold in the same breath. "The well-meaning and high-minded Viceroy", observed Churchill in the Commons on January 26, 1931, "has had to couple with his kindly speeches and sentiments a succession of repressive measures and of restrictions on civil liberty *without precedent in India since the Mutiny*, except in some days of the Great War." Again in a speech at the Albert Hall on March 18, 1931, he observed: "A calm, capable, determined Viceroy properly supported from home could maintain peace and tranquillity in India year after year with a tenth of the repressive measures which Lord Irwin has been compelled to employ." Again: "A tithe of those measures and of the suffering they entailed would have had their effect, if they had been accompanied by a confident and sober policy."

It was, however, "Lord Irwin's dear colleague and companion, the saint, the lawyer"—Gandhi—for whom the choicest Churchillian epithets and invective were naturally

1 Speech at Manchester January 30, 1931

reserved. In the very first meeting which he addressed under the auspices of the notorious "Indian Empire Society", he uttered the prophetic imprecation of his career : "The truth is that Gandhi-ism and all it stands for will sooner or later have to be grappled with and finally crushed. It is no use trying to satisfy a tiger by feeding him with cat's-meat." It was a fine figure of speech, indeed, to damn the greatest apostle of non-violence in the 20th century as a tiger before denying him the cat's-meat of political reforms. This classic phrase, therefore, deserved to survive even apart from its prophetic character.

Churchill was naturally happy when after its initial hesitation the steam-roller of law and order got a move on in India. He expressed satisfaction that "twenty-four thousand Indian politicians or their dupes are in gaol. Everywhere disorder has been repressed. The Gandhi movement which measured its strength with the Government of India has been for the moment, to a large extent, mastered." He was therefore annoyed when negotiations for a compromise were initiated soon after by the journalist George Slocombe, during a sensational interview he had with Gandhi in the Yeravada Prison in May 1930. Though nothing came out of it immediately, the incident created a great furore in Britain and Wedgewood Benn, the Secretary of State for India, publicly denied that he had in any way authorised Slocombe's mission.

The negotiations, however, were continued by those two famous "peace-makers," Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. M. R. Jayakar, and later on by Mr. Horace G. Alexander. Lord Irwin himself, though he had resorted to the familiar phenomenon of "Ordinance Raj", was not content to make of India a desert and call it peace. In the very thick of the struggle, he had the moral courage to pay a handsome tribute to Indian nationalism. "Howsoever emphatically

we may condemn the Civil Disobedience Movement," he observed in his annual speech before the European Association, Calcutta, "we should make a profound mistake if we underestimated the genuine and powerful meaning of Nationalism that is to-day animating much of Indian thought."

The efforts of the "peace-makers" received a powerful fillip at the Round Table Conference and at its conclusion Ramsay Macdonald himself declared in his valedictory address that "If there is response to the Viceroy's appeal from those engaged in civil disobedience, and others wish to co-operate on the general lines of this declaration, steps will be taken to enlist their services." Exactly a week after this announcement, Gandhi and his principal lieutenants were released unconditionally on the 26th of January, 1931.

Followed a month of hectic talks between Gandhi and Lord Irwin for a political settlement in India. So flatly contradictory were the view-points of the Congress and Government, that the negotiations always appeared to be on the verge of breakdown. The miracle was not that a formula satisfactory to both the parties was hammered out ultimately, but that the talks could continue so long at all. The honours for the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, which was consummated on the 5th of March 1931, were shared evenly. Gandhi himself publicly paid a handsome tribute to the Viceroy's inexhaustible patience and equally inexhaustible industry and unfailing courtesy." It was a victory for both the parties. It was one of the greatest days in Lord Irwin's life. In his Caesar's career he had won a Christian triumph.

Churchill viewed all these developments in London and New Delhi with undisguised disgust. Within four days of Gandhi's release, he severely castigated the Viceroy in a speech at Manchester, for trying to negotiate with Gandhi while he was in gaol. "Gandhi, who is a fanatic and ascetic

of the fakir type well known in the East, rejected these overtures with contempt. But you can imagine how his prestige throughout India was raised by the fact that the mighty Indian Government first made him a martyr in the eyes of his fellows, and then, while he was actually their captive, solicited his aid. Now that the Round Table Constitution has been drafted and sent out to India 'on approval', Gandhi and thirty of his leading fellow-conspirators have been set at liberty, unconditionally, in the hopes that they will at any rate say some kind words about the scheme.

"As might have been expected, Gandhi was received rapturously by his followers. He has been made a martyr under very comfortable conditions, and a national hero without running any risk, and he now emerges on the scene a triumphant victor. It did not take him long to launch his new defiance at the Government of India."[1]

Cried Churchill in mounting anger: "If the Viceroy and the Socialist Government had wished to manufacture and foment disorder instead of helping to quiet it, they could hardly have acted otherwise than they have done." And when during the course of negotiations Gandhi began to pay his frequent and prolonged visits to Lord Irwin, Churchill's Tory soul writhed in agony: "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organising and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor. Such a spectacle can only increase the unrest in India and the danger to which white people there are exposed. It can only encourage all the forces which are hostile to British

1 *India* p. 74

authority."[1] After detailing a few of Gandhi's aims, Churchill observed: "Surely they form a strange basis for heart-to-heart discussions—'sweet' we are told they were—between this malignant subversive fanatic and the Viceroy of India."[2]

Such horror-struck charges of *lese-majeste* came ill from a person like Churchill who only a few years ago, during the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1923, in which he played a leading role, welcomed the Irish revolutionaries in his own home and warmly shook their blood-soaked hands. Men like Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins had a price on their heads and goodness knows how many lives had fallen to their guns. But still Churchill sought the co-operation of the Sinn Fein leaders, pleaded for a policy of "forget and forgive" and openly extolled their patriotism. As one of his biographers says of those days: "Winston's capacity for peace-making was taxed to the uttermost. He sent message after messsge to the men in Dublin, counselling, advising, encouraging and restraining. They were in the frankest terms—not communications of one Minister to another, but the outspoken letters that pass between friends who are men of affairs."[3]

But when a similar role was played by Irwin *vis-a-vis* Gandhi, Churchill heaped execrations upon it. It may be because, though the role was similar, the men were not. De Valera, Collins and Griffith covered their white skins with the correct European costumes while Gandhi kept most of his brown body bare to the sun's life-giving rays. The Irish revolutionaries were up to all the tricks of their British masters while Gandhi was a *knight sans peur et sans reproche*. And finally while the Irishmen gave two bullets for every one received from the Black and Tan, that idiot

1 *India*. p. 94 2 *Ibid*. pp. 94-5
3 Lewis Broad *Winston Churchill* p. 187

Gandhi always thought of turning his left cheek to him who had struck his right. His greatest threat to the mighty British Empire was to fill its jails with non-violent civil resisters. Such men are dangerous. They must be crushed !

No wonder then that Churchill was deeply incensed when the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement was signed. He called it "the natural and logical outcome of Round Table Conference. Gandhi with the deep knowledge of the Indian peoples, by the dress he wore—or did not wear—by the way which his food was brought him at the Viceregal Palace,[1] deliberately insulted, in a manner which he knew everyone in India would appreciate, the majesty of the King's representative. These are not trifles in the East. Thereby our power to maintain peace and order among the immense masses in India has been sensibly impaired." Churchill accused Lord Irwin of "having fostered the growth of Mr. Gandhi's power to an extent almost inconceivable."

"Mr. Gandhi and Congress have been raised before the eyes of hundreds of million as the champions of Indian nationalism against the white intruder, and henceforward they are the dominant and recognised power with whom we have immediately to deal. They have been raised to a towering pedestal of fame and eminence in the eyes of all disloyal elements in India as having inflicted upon the mighty Government, on whose functioning the safety of the whole country depends, such humiliation and defiance as has not been known since the British first trod the soil of India."[2]

1 The reference is to an occasion during the negotiations, when in order to save time, Gandhi had his goat's milk and date repast at the desk at which he was sitting in discussion with the Viceroy. The food was taken over by Miraben (Miss Madeline Slade, daughter of a British Admiral, and for many years a disciple of Gandhi.) Lord Irwin is said to have been greatly touched by this little incident.

2 *India* p. 106

In the same speech in the Commons (March 12, 1931,) Churchill painted the Indian situation following the Gandhi-Irwin pact in terms sufficiently lurid to curdle the blood of all God-fearing, Empire-loving Englishmen. " All over India expectations, aspirations and appetites have been excited and are mounting. Already Mr. Gandhi moves about surrounded by a circle of wealthy men, who see at their finger-tips the acquisition of the resources of an Empire on cheaper terms than were ever yet offered in the world. Sir, the Roman senator, Didius Julianus, was dining at a restaurant when they told him that the Praetorian guard had put the Empire up to auction and were selling it in the ditch of their camp; he ran out, and, according to Gibbon, bought it for £200 sterling per soldier. That was fairly cheap; but the terms upon which the Empire is being offered to this group surrounding Mr. Gandhi are cheaper still. "

It was easy from such premises to draw the conclusion of imminent bloodshed, chaos and anarchy in India. " The departure of the British from India, which Mr. Gandhi advocates, and which Mr. Nehru demands, would be followed first by a struggle in the North and thereafter by a reconquest of the South by the North and of the Hindus by the Moslems. This danger has not escaped the crafty foresight of the Brahmins. It is for that reason that they wish to have the control of a British army, or failing that, a white army of janissaries officered, as Mr. Gandhi has suggested, by Germans or other Europeans. They wish to have an effective fereign army, or foreign-organised army, in order to preserve their dominance over the Moslems and their tyranny over their own untouchables. There is the open plot of which we are in danger of becoming the dupes, and the luckless millions of Indians the victims.

"It is our duty to guard those millions from that fate."[1]

1 *India* p. 128

This was only the old "Not a rupee, not a virgin" bogey in reverse gear and I shall add only one more piece to the selection of Indian Churchilliana in this chapter. Mr. Churchill is speaking under the kindly auspices of the "Indian Empire Society" in the Albert Hall, London, on March 18, 1931: "Now that there is spread through India the belief that we are a broken, bankrupt, played-out power and that our rule is going to pass away and be transferred in the name of the majority to the Brahmin sect, all sorts of greedy appetites have been excited, and many itching fingers are stretching and scratching at the vast pillage of a derelict Empire.

"I read only last week of the crowd of rich Bombay merchants and millionaire millowners, millionaires on sweated labour, who surround Mr. Gandhi. What are they doing there, these men, and what is he doing in their houses? They are making arrangements that the greatest bluff, the greatest humbug and the greatest betrayal shall be followed by the greatest ramp. Nepotism, back-scratching, graft and corruption in every form will be the handmaidens of a Brahmin domination. Far rather would I see every Englishman quit the country, every soldier, every civil servant embark at Bombay, than that we should remain clutching on to the control of foreign relations and begging for trading facilities, while all the time we wear the mere cloak of dishonour and oppression."

No! Not the mere cloak!!

CHAPTER XII

"VIEWY HYSTERICAL MEGALOMANIA"

THE foregoing philippics of Churchill may well make the mythical reader from Mars wonder whether during 1930-1931 there was really any prospect of Britain quitting

India bag and baggage. Churchill's diatribes would almost make that Martian stranger believe that the Socialist Government of Britain had already booked their passage on the last steamer home. We have seen, however, how with his fatal propensity for prevarication, Ramsay Macdonald strangled the Dominion Status declaration in its very cradle and how subsequently, in dealing with the Civil Disobedience Movement, Lord Iriwn resorted to repressive measures which were in Churchill's words "without any precedent in India since the Mutiny." The Ordinances were certainly not the swan-song of an Empire which had voluntarily decided to dissolve itself and to hand over the trust-held patrimony to the rightful owners.

The first Indian Round Table Conference which was inaugurated by His Majesty the King Emperor at a public session in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords on November 12, 1930, met against the background of overflowing jails and cracked heads. In spite of the number of eminent gentlemen and panoplied Princes who attended it, it was utterly unrepresentative of the nationalist opinion in India. An air of unreality thus hung over the St. James' Palace, where after its inaugural ceremony the business sessions of the Conference were held. Even if it had the intention, the Labour Government had not the courage to grant a real home-rule constitution to India. It was in power under sufferance of the Liberal Party and, on the Indian issue at any rate, it could not hazard to ride roughshod over Conservative opinion. As far as the Indian members were concerned, they were, at best, mere nominees in their own merit, and, at worst, Charlie MacCarthies saying their puppet pieces as directed by New Delhi.

The destinies of 400 million people were entrusted to the deliberations of such a body, which had neither a past nor a future, which was without roots either in India or in Bri-

tain, and which was caught at the very moment of its birth in the cross-fire from the extremities. As one wades through its bulky reports at this distance of time, one feels as if one were witnessing a shadow play by Shankar, the gigantic figures flitting hither and thither, now making love, now fighting to death, gesticulating, grimacing, laughing, always remaining shadows.

Nevertheless, for the first few days the verbal acrobatics of Ramsay Macdonald, who presided over it, the oratorical exploits of the Indian delegates and the Princes' *beau jeste*, that they were prepared to join the Indian Federation, invested the Round Table Conference with a certain verisimilitude. Stung by the abuse and the ridicule from their countrymen for participating in such a *tamasha*, the members of the Conference flung themselves zealously into the task of framing a constitution which would be treated by posterity as a sacred inheritance.

They battled heroically with first principles, and cried *Eureka ! Eureka ! !* when all the diverse elements agreed—each with its own mental reservations—on a federal constitution for India, the constitution which fourteen years after the first Round Table Conference is still lying suspended in the womb of time. They recapitulated history, quoted poetry and told each other what jolly good fellows they were. Arriving at brasstacks, they split themselves into nine sub-committees and heroically bore the rigours of the British winter for ten long weeks. In the end, when they found the task of constitution-making far more tough and knobby than they had imagined in their first flush of enthusiasm, they passed a milk-and-water resolution before dissolving themselves.

It would not be amiss to give here an extract from the speeches of the Prime Minister, which set the key-note of the Round Table talks. Here is an extract from an earlier session :

"We have made a great contribution here, you have made a great contribution, to the style of the architecture of the constitution. I had an Indian illustration in my mind. I do not think I will give it. You know, I have wandered up and down India, I have seen your beautiful old architecture. Under its walls, and standing in its shadows, I have tried to pour out my Western—prejudices shall I call them ?—not exactly, because I do not think they are prejudices but my Western upbringing—and I have been able to revel in that extraordinary blossoming of the artistic Indian mind. Style of architecture, my friends,—remember this—has a great controlling influence on the mind that abides with it. Give us a constitution which is crude and alien in its construction, and it will not help us.

"Give us a constitution which is in accordance with experience, which has become part and parcel of your spiritual thoughts, and that will help you. And the contribution I make to the style of the architecture of your constitution is this. The most characteristic foundation of our common Aryan civilization, of our common social order, is the family. The family, as the Begum said yesterday, united in the village, the village united in the district and so on—India a Federation, a Federation which is flexible, a Federation which meets the historical inheritance you have all got, in so far as it is worthy to be carried into the future, a Federation which enables mergings to take place, a Federation which embodies in itself the authority of the State and the liberty of the individual; the superiority of the combination, and homage at the same time to the containing smaller co-ordinating groups within the Federation; that is in accordance, I think, both with the Indian genius and the British genius, because as a matter of fact, in our fundamentals we drink at the same historical fountains and are refreshed by the same historical reminiscences."[1] (*Sic.*)

1. Proceedings of the First Round Table Conference. pp. 184–5

It is a long quotation but it pretty well illustrates the manner and the matter of the proceedings of the Conference. And now as a tail-piece to the above, read this parting tribute paid to Mr. Ramsay Macdonald by H. H. the late Maharaja of Alwar : "I do not think that in the whole wide world, if I had my choice, I could have selected a bigger benevolent autocrat than you have been as the Chairman of the Conference. You have guided its deliberations ; you have taken part in its proceedings ; you have done your best to save time, and to save India's face. And look at the result !"[1]

Churchill did. He looked with utter loathing at "the viewy hysterical megalomania of the Round Table Conference" which was being enacted before his eyes. While the Conference was holding its very first session in December 1930 he declared : "The British nation has no intention whatever of relinquishing effectual control of Indian life and progress. The Round Table Conference now sitting has no power to frame a constitution for India. No agreement reached at the Conference will be binding in any degree, morally or legally, upon the Parliament."[2] He did not spare the delegates to the Conference, who being hand-picked by Government were fair target for the Churchillian shafts. "The Indian gentlemen and the notabilities are in no way representative of the real forces which challenge British rule in India."[3] They are "with no delegated authority, so far as the forces with which we have to deal are concerned, no power to conclude an agreement and still less any power to enforce it."[4]

Churchill was nevertheless taken aback by the spirit of co-operation which was displayed on all sides during the

1. Proceedings of the First Round Table Conference p. 457
2. Speech in London. December 12, 1930.
3. *Ibid.* 4 Speech in House of Commons, January 26, 1931.

first sitting of the Conference—a spirit which was to become conspicuous by its absence in subsequent sessions. He was appalled by the "hysterical landslide of opinion" which took place in Britain itself regarding the work of the Conference. He attacked the Blue Book on the Round Table Conference in biting terms: "This document here, which is its work, cannot be considered as anything else but the work of a would-be and unauthorised Constituent Assembly; and His Majesty's Government, eagerly catching their mood, set to work without more ado to frame a federal constitution for all India, embodying the principle of a responsible Indian Ministry at the summit and centre of Indian affairs, the whole leading up speedily to that full Dominion Status with all that it entails, including—as one of the members of the Conference, Mr. Sastri, was careful to remind us—as one of its most important features, the right to secede from the British Empire.

"While all the world wondered, the Sovereign Power which had created modern India and which was still its sole support and defence, smilingly, blandly and no doubt in most statesmanlike language, engaged in unlimited hypothetical discussions about how to unite all the existing forces of Indian life, so as to be able to hand over to them the executive powers of the central Government and the title-deeds of the British position in India. *It was even pretended, or at any rate allowed to appear, that Indian disunity was the only or main obstacle to our speedy departure.*"[1]

If anything riled Churchill the Imperialist most, it was the fact that the Indian Princes—the protégés as well as the patrons of British Imperialism—had themselves suddenly plumped for federation. He considered it "the most disquieting feature of all." "The action of the Princes may be due to the belief now spreading so widely through-

1 *India* pp. 53-54

out the masses of India, that the British Raj will shortly cease to function, and that it will be succeeded by the Congress Raj and the Gandhi Raj or some other form, and that Great Britain under the Socialists and under universal suffrage, if pressed enough, if squeezed enough, if kicked enough, if worried enough, will acquiesce in such a revolution." He pooh-poohed the safeguards listed in the Blue Book as "temporary expedients, apologetically adopted." He viewed the federation at the centre and full responsible Government as "a double concurrent convulsion." He summed up the work done by the First Round Table Conference in the following words in a speech in the Commons: "Sir, I say that is a frightful prospect to have opened up so wantonly, so recklessly, so incontinently and in so short a time."[1]

Churchill marshalled all his resources to nullify that prospect as far as he could. It was ominous from his point of view that Gandhi himself was being pressed by Lord Irwin to attend the Second Round Table Conference. He told an audience in Albert Hall on March 18, 1931: "Mr. Gandhi, their supreme hope, is to come to London, as soon as they can persuade him to come, and here in the centre of the Empire, he will discuss with British Ministers and politicians the best means for breaking it up. *But by that time we shall be ready too.* We shall not be taken by surprise, as the country was during the (first) Round Table Conference."

Churchill's first success came when Mr. Baldwin rejected the proposal to join in the three-party delegation which, Lord Irwin had proposed, should be sent out to India, probably as the British representatives to the Second Round Table Conference to be held in this country. He declared in the Commons: "I see in the pursuit of the

1 January 26, 1931.

Round Table Conference neither peace to India, nor prosperity for Lancashire." But if at all the Conference was to assemble again, it should do so in London and not 5000 thousand miles away in India. "If the British people are to lose their Indian Empire, they shall do so with their eyes open, and not be led blindfold into a trap."

Churchill's second success came with the retirement of Lord Irwin from the Viceroyalty in April 1931. Lord Willingdon, who succeeded him, was a seasoned diplomat and, though a genial gentleman personally, was a firm believer in the power of the steel frame. He could at any rate be trusted to put a stop to the Christian hocus-pocus indulged in by his predecessor with the half-naked fakir. And the third and the greatest success of Churchill came with the collapse of the Labour Government a few months later and the emergence of the National Government. True, thanks to his betrayal of everything he had struggled for all his life, Ramsay Macdonald still remained the Prime Minister. He was, however, no longer the wild Socialist but the tame lion delighting in licking the bejewelled hands of duchesses, kept in 10, Downing Street at the pleasure of Stanley Baldwin, who commanded a clear Conservative majority in Parliament.

This single event should have finally set at rest all genuine fears and doubts of men like Churchill. The solid Conservative phalanx in the Commons led by the redoubtable Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Secretary of State for India, was surely not going to surrender the Indian Empire to Gandhi. Partly to present the facade of a National Government and partly to humour the Prime Minister, who had committed himself to bring out a second edition of the Round Table Conference, the new Cabinet declared that they would continue the Indian policy of its predecessor. But the worst danger was tided over. India was safe for Britain

and all good Tories could sleep in peace. Even the members of the Indian Empire Society believed that their mission was successful.

Not so Churchill. On the Indian issue he remained as much against the National as the Labour Government, for the simple reason that the former ostensibly followed the policy of the latter. He could have no truck with it as much out of conviction as due to force of circumstances. After all, the formation of the National Government virtually put a full stop to Churchill's hope of returning to power. He was *persona non grata* as much to Baldwin as to Macdonald. Neither would they ever think of offering him a seat in the Cabinet nor could he be content to remain a mere camp-follower of the National Government. For five long years more, he would have to continue his journey through the wilderness. Why should he then pull down his "Save India for Britain" flag ? The fight must go on.

This seems to be the rationale of Churchill's career for the next five years. He was fighting for India. He was also fighting for Churchill himself. And, to some extent, he was fighting for his life-long love of fighting. He was anxious to keep the integrity of the Empire, though it sounds ridiculous to suggest that the Empire was in the least jeopardy any longer. But he was equally anxious not to allow his individuality to sink in the overwhelming Government majority. He, Winston Churchill, could be trusted to give Macdonald and Baldwin a good run for their Government.

He, therefore, continued his "Hands off India" campaign with unabated vigour. He would have nothing to do with the Round Table show. He swore by his own version of the Simon Commission Report. And he would prefer to go back to the preamble of the Government of India Act, 1919.

Though his policy of negation remained the same, Churchill had to revise his strategy after the General Election of 1931. No longer could he pose as the champion of the Conservative Party as he used to do in the preceding two years, for the Conservatives were in power and they did not need a champion any longer. Nor could he deliver his broadsides against the Socialists, for not only was there no Labour Government, but the Labour Party itself was scattered to the winds. Churchill could no longer hope even to influence the debates in the Commons by his oratorical exploits, as the Conservative cohorts always trooped dutifully into the Government lobby at the crack of the whip, as Churchill realised to his bitter chagrin again and again during the succeeding years.

New campaigns needed new weapons. Or rather the return to the old, trusted, never-failing weapon of "divide and rule". Twenty-five years earlier he had expressed the opinion that the British would have to pack off from India if the Indians agreed to have nothing at all to do with them. He must have recalled that unconscious prophecy as he saw Hindu and Muslim, Prince and plebeian, untouchable and Anglo-Indian sitting together at the Round Table in the St. James' Palace. The Conference itself may have achieved nothing—but it certainly gave a foretaste of what Indians would accomplish if they really got together, not as Hindu and Muslim etc. asking for loaves and fishes, percentages and safeguards for each of them, but as Indians demanding the freedom for India in the name of India.

Their Highnesses the Princes must be kept in tow and warned of the pitfalls ahead of them in the path of Federation. Why, it would be hara-kiri for them ! Their Lownesses the Untouchables must be urged to save themselves from the horrible tyranny of the Brahmins as typified by Gandhi and to remain under the protection of a Christian

power, which does not recognise any caste—except the caste of colour ! And, of course, the brave, proud Muslims would never allow themselves to be dominated by the Hindu *Banias.* Then there were the vested British interests which faced extinction at the hands of the Congress, which was talking of the repudiation of debts and what not. All these forces must be rallied together ; all these drags must be put on the feet of nationalist India.

So one fine evening the Albert Hall echoed the Churchillian thunder : " What spectacle could be more sorrowful than that of this powerful country casting away with both hands, and up till now almost by general acquiescence, the great inheritance which centuries have gathered ? What spectacle could be more strange, more monstrous in its perversity, than to see the Viceroy and the high officials and agents of the Crown in India labouring with all their influence and authority to unite and weave together into a confederacy all the forces adverse and hostile to our rule in India ?

" One after another our friends and the elements on which we ought to rely in India are chilled, baffled and dismissed, and finally even encouraged to band themselves together with those who wish to drive us out of the country. It is a hideous act of self-mutilation, astounding to every nation in the world. The Princes, the Europeans, the Moslems, the Depressed classes, the Anglo-Indians—none of them know what to do nor where to turn in the face of their apparent desertion by Great Britain. Can you wonder that they try in desperation to make what terms are possible with the triumphant Brahmin oligarchy ? "[1]

This particular speech was delivered before the formation of the National Government. But the protection of the minorities—which included the Princes!—formed the burden

1 *India* pp. 119--20

of the Churchillian song ever afterwards, the more so because he could no longer pose as the champion of real Conservative opinion, as he used to do in the Labour-baiting days. The utmost he could do was to espouse the cause of Lancashire, which was hard hit by the boycott of British goods in India, which he condemned as "a criminal conspiracy in restraint of trade, and ought never to be accepted or legalised." "The proper policy is to declare the boycott illegal and enforce the law against the organisers of the boycott." The unfortunate communal riots of Cawnpore in 1931 were exploited in Britain as evidence of the implacable enmity between Hindu and Muslim, though a person like Churchill could hardly appreciate the sublime gesture of a Hindu Congress leader like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi sacrificing his life for the protection of his Muslim brothers.

The caravan of the Round Table Conference again pitched its tents in London in September 1931 in spite of the protests of Churchill. Not only that but his worst forebodings came true and in its train arrived the Mickey Mouse of a man, wearing a loin cloth and a disarming smile. Gandhi had come to the capital of the British Empire, as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress, to ask for the surrender of the title-deeds of India !

It promised to be the most dramatic moment in the history of India. It turned out to be the most humiliating. Instead of closing their ranks and demanding freedom for their country with a unanimous voice, even before making sure whether the British Government was prepared to give anything at all, the Indian delegates indulged in "a sinful wrangle" among themselves for half a seat there and half a vote here, like cocks fighting on a dunghill for stray grains. The Conference broke down on the rock of communal differences. India was made the laughing-stock of the world and the British Imperialists had their heartiest

chuckle of some years. Though every Indian delegate to the Second Round Table Conference must share the shame of its fiasco, the causes of its failure, as Gandhi said in a speech at the Conference, were inherent in its composition: "If we knew in a definite manner that we were going to get the thing we want, we should hesitate fifty times before we throw it away in a sinful wrangle."[1]

On another occasion, addressing the Prime Minister he said: "You did not convene this Round Table Conference and bring us all six thousand miles away from our homes and occupations to settle the communal question; but you convened us, you made deliberate declarations that we were invited to come here to share the process of constitution-building.....Now we are face to face with a wholly different situation, namely, that because there is no communal settlement agreed to by us, there is to be no building of the constitution."[2] Ramsay Macdonald gave a peach of a reply to this challenge: "This work is going to go on. Do not make any mistake about that. This work is going to go on and it is going to come to a successful issue too."[3]

Going—Going—Gone !!

Apart from the artful manner in which the National Government was manouevering the Conference—at one stage Wedgewood Benn, who had not ratted from the Labour party like its leader, bluntly accused the Government of killing the Conference!—considerable activity was going on behind the scenes to sabotage the Conference or at any rate to smash the Congress. We have it on the testimony of the notorious Benthall[4] Circular: "On the

1 *Proceedings of the Second Round Table Conference* p. 1346

2 *Ibid* p. 1381 3 *Ibid* p. 1387

4 Then a member of R. T. C. representing the European Commercial Community in India. Now Sir Edward Benthall, War Transport Member of the Government of India.

whole there was one policy of the British Nation and the British community in India, and that was to make up our minds on a national policy and to stick to it. But after the general elections, the right of the Government made up its mind to break up the Conference and to fight the Conference and to fight the Congress. The Muslims, who do not want responsibility at the Centre, were delighted. Government undoubtedly changed their policy and tried to get away with Provincial Autonomy, with a promise of Central reforms. We had made up our minds that the fight with the Congress was inevitable; we felt and said that the sooner it came the better, but we made up our minds that for a crushing success we should have all possible friends on our side. The Muslims were alright; the Minorities Pact and Government's general attitude ensured that. So were the Princes and the Minorities."[1]

This is direct from the horse's mouth. The policy of "Divide and rule" followed by Churchill and his fellow-Imperialists had paid an immediate and bounteous dividend. Gandhi was ceremoniously discredited in the eyes of Britain and promptly put behind prison bars on his return to India. There was neither a Labour Government nor a Christian Viceroy now to pamper to the half-naked Fakir and his revolutionary dupes. "Gandhi-ism and all it stands for" was being relentlessly crushed in India with all the power and finesse at the command of the Indian Government, while in Britain the shadow-play of the Round Table Conference was yet being unreeled in a slow-motion serial. And Churchill's voice was still ringing in protest against those shadows.....the shadows falling upon that most truly bright and precious gem in the British Crown !

1 See Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya *The History of The Congress*. pp. 872-74

CHAPTER XIII

LION AMONG THE RABBITS

"*MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL, you have held high office under the Crown over a long series of years; you have been good enough to prepare a Memorandum, which is marked No. 87, and which you now hand in.*"[1]

This is the Marquess of Linlithgow opening the proceedings of the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform at 5 p. m. on Monday, the twenty-third of October 1933. Churchill is appearing as a witness before the Committe of Lords and Commons with which are associated a number of Indian gentlemen in a consultative capacity.[2]

It is an occasion of considerable importance, as Churchill has long since been recognised as the principal opponent of the Indian constitutional proposals of the National Government, as also of the Macdonald-Baldwin alliance, to which he attributed most of the political convulsions which Britain suffered in the early thirties. Only five months prior to his appearance before the Joint Parliamentary Committee, he had attacked its very *raison d'etre*—the White Paper—in the following words: "This White Paper is not a constitution; it is a paradox, it is an elaborate grimace. At no part or period in its structure is there confidence, trust or decision. It is a jumble of contra-

1 The quotations given in this and the following chapter are from the *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Joint Committee on Indian Reforms.* As they ean be easily verified from the context, no separate page references are given.

2 Those who were present during Churchill's examination were: Sir Akbar Hydari, Sir Manubhai Mehta, Mr. Y. Thombare, H. H. The Aga Khan, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Sir Hubert Carr, Mr. A. H. Ghuznavi, Lt.-Col. Sir H. Gidney, Sir Hari Singh Gour, Messrs M. R. Jayakar, Zafrulla Khan, N. M. Joshi, Sir Abdur Rahim, Sir Phiroze Sethna, Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan, Sardar Buta Singh.

dictions and needlessly fomented antagonisms. It is an amalgamation of small expedients and counterchecks. It is a gimcrack edifice built up of odds and ends by the pygmies."[1]

Long before this, when the Joint Select Committee was first appointed, Churchill refused the invitation to join it because, as he said in a letter to Sir Samuel Hoare: "If the scheme of the White Paper is carried out, it can only lead after some years either to evacuation or reconquest of India. I do not wish to share the burden of such grievous events... .....It is better that those who believe in the policy of the White Paper should work it out for themselves in the Joint Select Committee, unhampered by the criticism or protest of those from whom they are unbridgeably divided."

It was therefore a pleasant surprise, particularly to the Indian associates of the Committee, that Churchill should not only offer a considered and exhaustive memorandum of his criticism and protest, but also present himself in person as a witness before the Committee. The giant had at last condescended to appear among the pygmies, the British lion among the Indian "rabbits," who (he had implied on a memorable occasion) wanted to chase the king of beasts "from the fields and forests of his former glory."

None of the "rabbits" suffered the revolutionary contagion of the Congress, which was once again secure behind prison bars under the firm hand of Lord Willingdon, to whom Churchill paid a glowing tribute in his Memorandum. There were more knights than misters among them. All of them were hand-picked and therefore harmless. They were the last persons to think of setting the Ganges on fire or to insist upon immediate and complete independence. Individually, they were no doubt men of sterling integrity and great intellectual ability and, in their own way,

1 Speech at Manchester, May 1933.

patriotic. By their team work in the Joint Select Committee, they did much to wipe off the shame and humiliation of the Three Round Table Conferences. The unanimous report presented by the British Indian Delegation to the Joint Select Committee was a model of reasoning and sobriety. They forgot for once that they were Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis or Anglo-Indians and made united recommendations to the Committee, with whose labours they were associated so long.

It is matter of history that not a single of those recommendations was accepted by the Joint Select Committee in its final report to Parliament, thus exposing the sham and hypocrisy underlying the whole technique of the constitutional reform. And yet the British spokesmen have no compunction of conscience in affirming solemnly all these years that the only thing which prevents them from granting freedom to India is the lack of unity in India! Whenever I hear such sanctimonious words uttered, I feel like flinging in the face of the critic the report signed by such diverse personalities as His Highness the Aga Khan and the Labourite honest-to-goodness N. M. Joshi, the indepressible Dr. Ambedkar and the Anglo-Indian Lieut.-Col. Gidney, Sir Hubert Carr, the European magnate of Calcutta and Sardar Buta Singh, the feudal zamindar from the Punjab, Messrs Jayakar and Zafrulla Khan, between whom the only common factor—their membership of His Majesty's Privy Council—was yet to be established.

So long was Churchill indulging in vague generalities and sweeping indictments on the whole issue of Indian constitutional reforms that the members of the Joint Select Committee and their Indian associates must have been mighty happy that they were at last presented with an opportunity to bring him to brasstacks and to subject his opinions and prescriptions to a searching examination.

Fortunately for them—though rather unfortunately for himself—he had presented a Memorandum in which he had essayed the ambitious task of offering the broad lines of an alternative scheme of "reforms" of his own. A perusal of the Memorandum will prove immensely profitable today, when he is holding the destinies of India in his hands, as it throws an oblique beam of light on the political principles and the mental make-up of Churchill. After all, he considered the facts of India to be immemorial and a mere decade cannot scratch their encrusted surface.

For our present purposes, the following summary, in the author's own words, would suffice: (1) Dominion Status does not imply or involve "dominion constitution" or polity. (2) India is comparable to Europe rather than any single country in it. (3) The responsibility of the Parliament for the well-being of the Indian masses may be delegated, but is inalienable. (4) The existing form of Central government in India though no doubt capable of minor improvements has been equal to all the stresses of the last ten years, and the principle of Dyarchy, if introduced, would be fatal to its harmonious action. (5) Provincial Home Rule subject to special arrangements about Judiciary and the police is an experiment which should be given a fair trial. (6) It should not be prejudiced by proposals for further and wider change, or represented as a mere transition stage. (7) A high grade Inspectorate must ensure the proper spending of all grants from the Central government to the Provinces. (8) The establishment of self-governing provinces must precede all question of their union in a Federal system.

The first day of Churchill's evidence was occupied entirely by the British members of the Committee. They focused their attention mainly on the distinction between Dominion Status and Dominion Constitution, which was first elaborated by Churchill in the Parliamentary debate on

the White Paper in 1931. This distinction was becoming more and more complicated and almost metaphysical with the passage of time, and the Committee was engaged for a considerable period in developing and exploding Churchill's arguments on this particular topic.

It was pointed out to the witness that this distinction was an after-thought and pure sophistry, and that most British statesmen were using the term Dominion Status as equivalent to Dominion Constitution. Even His Majesty the King, in the message he sent to India in 1921 through the Duke of Connaught and in the Instrument of Instructions given to the Governor-General, used those words in their natural and fair sense. To imply now that Dominion Status was purely an honorific and ceremonial term and that it did not embrace Dominion Constitution would make the Indians feel—as Mr. F. S. Cocks put it to the witness—that they had been misled by " verbal chicanery ".

Lord Irwin further pinned Churchill down by quoting a number of his speeches where he himself had used the term "Dominion Status" without hedging it round in any way. The witness had to admit it was so: "I do not except myself from the scope of any censures of that kind; indeed I reproach myself if, in using this term, I should have given rise to any misunderstanding." However, he immediately pulled himself up and proceeded: "I think the use of all these expressions must be judged by the circumstances of the time, the sounding board which makes them audible, the controversies which are in progress at the time, and there is no comparison at all with a statement of that kind, made immediately after the grant of Montford reforms, and statements on the same subject made after the Statute of Westminster."

" This would mean ", Mr. Jayakar subsequently pointed out, "that England would have to say to India: 'You took

part in the war. Your men died; your money was spent. After the war in conferences, we used the expression "Dominion Status" and in the King's Message in 1921 we promised you a hope of liberty on the same lines as other parts of the Empire, but, remember, gentlemen, you have made a mistake all these years. We never intended the expression in that way'.....That will be your message to India?" "No", replied Mr. Churchill, "my answer would be to read the first paragraph of the preamble of the Act of 1919"—which he proceeded to do at length! Long ago Humpty Dumpty said something very much like this to Alice: "When I use a word, it shall have the meaning I wish it to have—neither more nor less!" Mr. Jayakar's ingrained courteousness must have prevented him from indicating the obvious analogy to the witness.

But though Churchill admitted his terminological inexactitude and almost apologised for it, he stuck to the contention in his Memorandum that Indians should be made to understand that they will not get Dominion Status of the Westminster variety "in any period which human beings ought to take into practical account." "It is also pointed out that any period in which this hope can be achieved is one which *living men will not see.*"

Sir Samuel Hoare asked Churchill what he would do if he found no support whatever to his scheme in India. The reply was brutally frank: "If the proposals which I think you could safely embark upon were rejected, I should not be drawn to the conclusion that a catastrophe had occurred; quite the contrary." "And supposing," the Lord Chancellor asked a hypothetical question of Churchill, "you were satisfied that it was the earnest desire of the Indian political classes to have the proposals of the White Paper, would that modify your present position?"—"No, not at all." "Why not?"—"Because I think these proposals would be detri-

mental to the well-being of the Indian masses, injurious to the rights of Great Britain and destructive of the Parliamentary and Imperial control."

Sparks began to fly soon after the Indian delegation began to examine Churchill. And by a supreme irony it was a person like Lt.-Col. Sir Henry Gidney who caused the biggest explosion by asking an innocent question: "Mr. Churchill, you belong to a party that is called the Diehard Party, is it not?"—"No. I am not aware that there is any such party. It is an abusive term which is used by persons who are often found very ignorant of the real foundations of the British power and strength." To which Gidney promptly retorted: "That is exactly what I expected you to answer!" Similar, though not so heated, was the exchange between the witness and Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan: "Mr. Churchill, you are here to represent your personal views or the views of the party?"—"No, I have no party, except that I am a member of the Conservative party now." "So they are purely personal views not held by any section in England?" —"That would be a complete misreading of the answer."

In paragraph nine of his Memorandum, Churchill had expressed the fear that there would be deterioration in the Indian Public Services with the extension of self-government in India. During the course of his examination, he further asserted that there had actually been a sensible deterioration among many of the services during the Montford reforms. Naturally member after member of the Committee asked the witness to substantiate such a grave charge by specific illustrations. Both Messrs N. M. Joshi and Jayakar challenged him to give a single instance of deterioration while the former pointed out that, during the first decade of the Montford constitution, the progress in Education and in the improvement of the lot of the agriculturists was far quicker than at any time before.

Churchill adroitly tried at first to shift the onus of finding the proof on the Committee itself. *That was what it was sitting for—was it not?* Later on when Mr. Zafrulla Khan pursued the question again, Churchill observed: "I have already said that I am not proposing to frame a particular indictment against any service or any Province at all. I make a general statement, not a violent statement at all, that there has been a deterioration. I may be right, I may be also wrong, but anyhow I have given my opinion, and I have no further evidence to give upon that point."

Such evasive replies were not going to save Churchill. Sir John Wardlaw Milne asked him whether by any chance he had read *the Moral and Material Progress of India*, a Government Blue Book published every year, and whether it bore out in any way the charge of deterioration. Sir John even quoted Churchill's Indian Bible—the Statutory Commission Report itself—in rebuttal of the accusation. It was, however, left to Sardar Buta Singh to give the *coup de grace* to this particular Churchillian bogey. He told the witness that the only proofs he gave in support of his contention were words, not facts, and therefore "I would request you to modify that statement." To which Churchill weakly countered: "I am not making any sweeping accusation at all. I have heard from various quarters and, of course, the Joint Select Committee will have to make up its mind about that, that there has been a deterioration, but I may be wrong."

"Yes, you are wrong."

"I am wrong?"

"Yes."

"If that is so, I am, but I shall hold my judgment in suspense."

Early in the examination the following issue was raised by Sir Austen Chamberlain: "Mr. Churchill, your personal knowledge, drawn from an experience very similar to my

own of Indian administration, was probably, like my own, sketchy, vague and imperfect. I wondered whether you had fortified yourself by discussions with men who had had practical experience of that administration and felt, after talking with them, that it (your proposal) could be put into practice?"— "Yes. I was told by several people with great knowledge that something on those lines would be very reasonable and very helpful."

When his turn came, Mr. Jayakar was quick to seize this point and he referred the witness to the ardent support given to the reforms by a distinguished civilian like Sir Charles Innes, who rose to be a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and, later on, the Governor of Burma. Churchill at first contented himself with the reply that "Sir Charles Innes is a high expert and he has given his view. There are many other high experts (and this is one of the difficulties with which we are faced,) who have given directly opposite views." After allowing these words to sink in for some time, Mr. Jayakar returned to the charge and quoted Sir Charles Innes as saying that "in my view the alternative proposals (like Churchill's) fail because they do not offer any real or lasting solution for our present difficulties. They would depend, I believe, on repression, and repression is no remedy."

On being asked what he thought of this estimate, Churchill could hardly control his temper: "I think he is using ill-judged and mischievous language coming from a high authority, and I express my total disagreement with him and with the tone of his remarks, and with the occasion on which they were made." Mr. Jayakar promptly drove the advantage home: "Do you mean to suggest to this Committee that the opinion of such a veteran and trusted officer, who has occupied very important offices, should not be preferred to your opinion, which has been merely vaguely

formed from studies in this country?"—"It is for the Committee to judge entirely; he has expressed his view. You asked me what I thought of what he said, and I say I do not agree with it."

Sir Phiroze Sethna quoted even Lord Willingdon—to whose firm rule Churchill had paid a tribute in his Memorandum—as supporting the cause of Dominion Status. Later on, when Sir Phiroze proceeded to read an extract from the testimony given by Sir John Thompson, who had held the post of Chief Commissioner of Delhi and was the President of the "Union of Britain and India", Churchill cut in: "Is this the same Sir John Thompson who has recently become a propagandist in favour of the White Paper?" Again, when His Highness the Aga Khan read out to the witness a long list of distinguished personages, British and Indian, who were supporting the White Paper, he petulantly remarked: "If that argument is valid, why is the Joint Select Committee sitting?"

In spite of the numerous experts and authorities—who included even a figure like Sir Michæl O'Dwyer—quoted by member after member as favouring the reforms, Churchill could not or would not name a single person to support his reactionary scheme, as if he was under some vow of secrecy. He told Sir Phiroze Sethna: "I do not think it would be wise for me to define any of the sources from which I have formed the opinions you have asked me to lay before you."

In the end, however, the baiting proved unbearable for Churchill and on the third day he was provoked into the following outburst: "My opinion remains quite unmoved because these gentlemen are notorious propagandists and agitators in favour of the White Paper. They have formed a small society, supported, I believe, with the patronage in one form or another of the Conservative central office, and are actively carrying on a partisan campaign in all parts of

the country in order to gather support for the White Paper, and although their words are no doubt interesting to repeat and although we must not credit them with anything but sincerity, I decline utterly to take what they say as gospel. *Indeed, I should hardly have thought there was any testimony which should be more readily discounted than that which they give.*"

This was too much for the members of the Committee to stomach and the following passage-at-arms took place. To begin with, Sir Austen Chemberlain retorted with some asperity: "You are in fact carrying on a propagandist campaign of your own in opposition to them?"—"I am, in fact. That is perfectly true." Sir Samuel Hoare: "It would also be true to say that representatives of your propagandist organisation have given a great deal of evidence before the Committee."—"That may be so, true, but you would hardly expect to convert Sir John Thompson by reading out to him passages from my evidence!"

The Archbishop of Canterbury: "Are we to understand then, that whether it be Sir Michael O'Dwyer or Sir John Thompson or any one who has given the benefit of his experience to the guidance of English opinion in this matter, they are not to be trusted and their evidence is to be discounted by us?"—"No; I did not say that, nor would that be, your Grace, a fair assumption from what I said." "I thought you indicated in what you said that such evidence was to be much discredited?"—"To be discredited by those who do not agree with that point of view.....but I was not suggesting at all that the Archbishop should not weigh it and treat it at its proper value." "I am greatful to you," concluded His Grace with withering sarcasm, "for leaving my judgment free!"

The Marquess of Lothian: "Mr. Churchill, are we entitled to take it that it would be legitimate for this Com-

mittee to apply the same adjectives to your propagandists as you have applied to the propagandists on the other side ?"—"I have not the slightest doubt that Lord Lothian has already applied worse adjectives to them."

CHAPTER XIV

AN EXHAUSTING EXPERIENCE

A GOOD deal of attention was paid by the Indian delegation to the typical white man's burden argument developed by Churchill in his Memorandum :

"The Government of India is mainly an administrative problem.....The apparatus of Government in India is incomparably more important to the Indian masses than political change. Peace, justice, hygiene and scientific development form the sole foundation whereby not only the well-being and progress but even the very existence of scores of millions of Indians depends. The British Parliament is responsible at present for the maintenance of these essentials *and it should never endanger any of them seriously for the sake of gratifying the Indian intelligentsia by making political changes.* Whatever constitutional progress it is possible to make, must be subordinated to the paramount responsibility of Parliament for internal tranquility and efficient administration."

At the outset Sir Samuel Hoare dwelt on the constitutional position obtaining then. As far as the transferred subjects in the Provinces were concerned, Parliament could be said to have divested itself of its responsibility *de facto* if not *de jure.* He cited the authoritative conclusion of the Statutory Commission that "the effect (of the

transfer) is, broadly, that the Secretary of State and Parliament are not concerned with the administration of transferred subjects." Churchill's proposal therefore amounted to an actual retrogression on the situation existing in India since 1921.

It was not, however, so much the constitutional as the democratic, human aspect of the question which was taken up by the Indian delegates. Even a confirmed Tory like Earl Peel considered the distinction drawn by Churchill between the intelligentsia and the masses in India as somewhat excessive. He asked: "Is it your view, then, that this desire for constitutional change is only the product of the intelligentsia?"—"We have not got, unhappily, any exact definition of what the intelligentsia comprises, but a very small minority of the whole population is interested or concerned with political and constitutional change."

"Is not that so in almost every country?.....You cannot say that this demand is solely confined to them, because then you leave out the very great and growing influence they have over certain sections of the masses and even though the masses may not be keenly interested in certain constitutional changes, if they are led by their political leaders, probably they will support their leaders in that demand."—"That is one of the difficulties you have to face, but I do not know that I can add anything useful to what I have put down upon that point."

Mr. Jayakar pursued the issue from the same angle and made the following sporting offer to the witness: "Mr. Churchill, you are a person of great authority with this government. Will you see that this government takes a plebiscite from the masses on the plain and simple question —everybody having liberty to advocate in the masses— *Do the masses desire a government of their own people or government trammelled by the British?* Will you take a

plebiscite and be bound by it ?"—"No, I do not think that will be at all a fair or reasonable question to put to the masses of India. I am not aware of any machinery which exists by which an effective answer could be given to that at all."

On the offer being pressed, the witness replied: "I do not admit that it rests upon a plebiscite at all. The question is of the responsibilities of the Imperial Parliament and how far they can safely delegate them." Mr. Jayakar: "I am only asking you this: "When you suggest that the masses are not with the intelligentsia in their political demands, I am asking you on that question: What is your proof?"—"I give my belief, that is all—my opinion."

Sir Phiroze Sethna made a frontal assault upon Churchill's oft-repeated solicitude for the Indian masses, which he called pure camouflage. He challenged the witness: "The real intention of those who oppose the White Paper was properly conveyed by you in a letter which you addressed in December 1932 to the Blackpool Conservative Conference as follows—'The loss of a group of agricultural countries of Southern Ireland can be supported, but the loss of India, the central glory of the British Empire, will not only sound the death knell of our greatness, but destroy the very means of livelihood of millions of this island and especially of Lancashire."—"Quite untrue."

Sir Phiroze persisted in his queries and drew an illuminating reply from Churchill. "I put it to you that the Indians themselves must perforce have a greater regard for their own kith and kin than the British who are 6,000 odd miles away."—"I do not agree with that. I think if you look at what happened in China, you will see that however much people may have regard for their own kith and kin, it very often happened in the history of Asia that poor people had very rough treatment from their own kith and kin."

A similar damaging extract from a speech he delivered at Epping on July 8, 1933, was presented to Churchill by Sir Hari Singh Gour as an illustration of his two faces: "India is vital to the well-being of Britain, and I cannot help feeling very anxious when I see forces from which our population is largely supported being gradually diminished; foreign investments are slowly shrinking and shipping is at a low ebb. If to these we add the loss of India in one form or another, then problems will arise here incomparably more grave than any we have known. You will have a surplus population here which it may be beyond the power of the Government to provide for effectively." After quoting this, Sir Hari Singh asked: "May I take it that, knowing as you do your country, your angle of vision is more or less obscured by what you consider to be the interests of England as distinct from the interests of India?"—"No, I think that all legitimate interests are in harmony."

Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan put a straight question: "What is your conception of intelligentsia? Are they mere intellectuals without any stake in the country, without any influence, professional agitators, or professional demagogues, or are they the men of the tribe you find in other countries? Take, for instance, the men who are prominent in all countries, landed gentry, professional classes, who are taking a very active part in a very reasonable manner in making the reforms a success. Do you confound and confuse the purely intellectual and the demagogue with those classes just mentioned?"—"No, I used the word "intelligentsia" because it has a democratic ring about it which might be agreeable; but I think probably a better expression would be the politically-minded classes."

"And the politically-minded classes, I suppose, according to you, live in separate compartments absolutely divorced from all contact with the masses?"—"Where have I said

that ?" "You have not said that," continued the interlocutor, "but that is the drift of the whole of your Memorandum."—"The proportion of the politically-minded classes in India is probably smaller (proportionately) than in any other country in the world." This exchange was capped by a perfect poser by Dr. S. A. Khan : "At what time does a person who rises from the masses and becomes a political leader, cease to be a member of the masses and becomes a politically-minded class ?"—"Every case must be judged individually," was the weak reply.

But it was again left to Sardar Buta Singh (who proudly introduced himself as a member of the masses) to lead the witness up the garden. By a series of Socratic questions he committed Churchill to saying that he was actuated by "very good feelings" for the well-being of the Indian masses. Then the Sardar quietly asked him : "Would you agree that the masses should be given adult suffrage ?"—"No," "Why not ?"—"Because I think it is quite impracticable." "If it is practicable and if it is to their interests, would you or would you not agree to it, if it is proved to you that it is to their benefit; because in that case I would like to put before you that they would be able to look after their own affairs; not only the handful of the educated people, as you appear to say, but they will themselves come forward, and will look after and take care of their own interests."

Churchill : "I think adult suffrage in India is outside any idea which anyone has put forward at the present time, and I think it is extremely arguable if it were practicable to have elections in which seventy or eighty millions or more of voters could record their votes. It appears to me to be very doubtful whether that would afford a foundation upon which good government would arise." The Sardar persisted: "Then you so far agree that these masses have got much at stake and that they should be given much more power to

manage their own affairs."—"But," (note Churchill's reply) "experience often shows that when they are given votes and told that they can manage their own affairs, the first step they have taken in a great many countries is to yield themselves up to Dictatorship."

So the Churchillian syllogism boiled down to this: The Indian masses cannot be allowed to manage their own affairs because of the danger of their surrendering themselves to dictatorship. Nor can the Indian intelligentsia be trusted to look after their own kith and kin, because in Asia the upper classes are in the bad habit of exploiting the masses of poor people. *Ergo*, the British must carry on (from 6,000 miles away) their sacred trusteeship of the Indian people in perpetuity! Q. E. D.

It was the representatives of the Princes, who turned the tables completely upon Churchill. This spectacle was full of irony because he always posed as the protagonist of the Princes and had frequently accused the British Government of putting pressure upon them to join the Federation against their own interests. Behind this persistent championing lay not so much the disinterested love of the Princes —when the occasion arose, he could shower choice epithets upon their feudal heads like any rabid extremist in India!— but another subtle and not so unselfish a motive.

Churchill's main objection was, of course, directed against the Federal proposals in the White Paper. In his Memorandum he made a strong plea for keeping the Central Government strong, integral and intact while India was embarking upon the hazardous adventure of provincial home rule. The latter must precede the former. "First the sticks and then the faggots; first the bricks and then the wall." It was apparent, however, that the Government were bent upon carrying through their Federal plans in spite of such warnings. The best way of foiling this move would be

to seduce the Princes from their agreement to join the Federation. If the States were somehow prevailed upon to disavow their earlier commitments, Federation would be nipped in the bud—as it has actually been. The propaganda guns of Churchill and Co. were therefore for a long time engaged in blasting the Princes' adherence to Federation.

It was not until the third day that the representatives of the Princes had an opportunity to examine the witness. Sir Akbar Hydari opened the innings: "Mr. Churchill, are you one of those who consider that the Indian Princes, at the time of the Declaration they made at the First Round Table Conference, were stampeded into Federation?"—"I should hardly like to use such an expression of such exalted personages, but I think they were very precipitate in what they did. I think they took a course which, a long view will show, will not be in accordance with their interests as ruling Princes." When Sir Akbar quoted chapter and verse to prove that far from being precipitate, the Princes' decisions were arrived at after full and prolonged deliberations, the witness had to eat humble pie and admit that it was so.

However, he trotted out the old mischievous suggestion that when the Declaration was made, "the Princes felt insecure—felt that perhaps there was going to be a great departure of the British, a relinquishment of power by the British altogether and in that case, it would be necessary for them to come to terms with the new authorities which were going to rule." All such dangers had passed away with the Labour Government—though Churchill did not put it so bluntly—and therefore "I have regretted certainly that the Princes should have come forward at this stage when so much is unknown and unknowable and have committed themselves, or some of them have committed themselves, to this Federal scheme."

It was Sir Manubhai Mehta who compelled Churchill to confess in so many words, that his anxiety was not so much for the security of the Princes, as for the continuation of the British autocracy in India: "Mr. Churchill, may I ask you in whose interests you deplore their (the Princes') readiness to help their country ? · I will put three questions: Did you consider that the Princes have walked into the parlour lightheartedly like the fly, or do you consider from the standpoint of certain British Indian democrats that the Princes' advent into the Federation has diluted their democracy; or, thirdly, do you deplore this attitude of the Princes from the standpoint of certain Englishmen who think that if the Princes had not come in, responsible government would have been denied to India ?"

The witness was cornered and had to throw off the mask of love for the Princes: "Naturally, I look at it, first of all from the point of view of the Imperial Government—the British Government. I think that the British Government in India will be greatly weakened and that serious difficulties will arise if at the time you are setting up these Provincial Home Rule Governments, the power at the Centre is confused and divided by dyarchy, and, consequently, I am not in favour of the institution of responsible government at the Centre at the present time.....Therefore, naturally, I do not welcome the arrival of the Princes to render possible or to bring within the sphere of action a course which I think will be detrimental."

The cat was out of the bag but the witness was too seasoned a politician to be discomfited by such an exposure. On the contrary, he decided that an offensive provided the best defence in such a predicament and proceeded to reiterate all his old arguments in reply to the questions that were put to him: "It seems to me altogether premature from the Princes' point of view for them to associate them-

selves with the White Paper scheme at the Centre." "I think they may very easily find themselves exposed to subversive movements in their own States, and in the Assembly, find themselves criticised for not giving a greater measure of contentment to their people." Again, "I feel that they (Princes) should continue to press their views upon the Imperial Government and have trust and confidence in that Government, much more than put their trust and confidence in untried institutions arising out of democratic electioneering, which in many cases has proved fatal to the old traditions of States and countries."

The accusation frequently made by Churchill and his friends that the Princes were being unduly influenced by the Government to join the Federation soon came before the Committee. Sir Manubhai Mehta asked : "As to pressure, did you come across a letter signed by Sir Akbar Hydari and the Ministers of several other large states like Mysore, Baroda and Patiala, and by myself, which categorically denied that there was any pressure?" This formidable rebuttal was too much for the witness to swallow. He began to hedge and prevaricate and beat about the bush, as clever witnesses always do in such circumstances : "It is not a point which is really capable of denial. Pressure is not necessarily illegitimate pressure.....The very loyalty of the Princes, their desire to fulfil what may be the general inclinations of the Imperial Government, constitute a form of pressure, not improper pressure, although unwisely applied.....The whole of this movement is largely induced by the great and lawful and legitimate influence of the Crown on the loyalty of the Princes. I deplore it very much."

Then followed a dramatic interlude. Sir Samuel Hoare, who as the Secretary of State for India was directly affected by such charges, got up and threw down the gage : "Would the representatives of the Princes here substantiate what

Mr. Churchill has just said, namely, that the action of the Princes was due to pressure, direct or indirect, from here ?" Swift came the response from Sir Manubhai Mehta. which was also vigorously endorsed by his two colleagues—Sir Akbar Hydari and Mr. Y. Thombare—who alone were present at the session : "We deny it absolutely, categorically. His Highness the Maharajah of Bikaner, several months before the Round Table Conference, anticipated that there would be the only solution which was the Federal solution, and he advised his friends that Federation must be accepted. That was the only destiny for the Princes, and Federation had no fear or threat for them. Notwithstanding that, I cannot understand why it is repeatedly said that pressure is being exercised upon Princes by the Government."

Not only were the tables turned upon Churchill but he must have felt as if the very chair was being knocked off from beneath him. He must have surely cried *Et tu Brute!* —though this remark is not found in the official report. The reply on record is nevertheless equally expressive of the plight of the witness : "I do not wish to press this point here, because it would, I think, lead me into friction and controversy beyond those limits which are appropriate in the Committee and, therefore, I will, if I may be excused by you, my Lord Chairman, not develop any further evidence upon this point." Churchill had had enough !

The reader, too, must have had enough by now of Churchill's exhibition before the Joint Select Committee. There is no space here further to elucidate how the members of the Committee and their Indian associates disposed of the other grotesque features of Churchill's scheme, like the appointment of a high grade Inspectorate to ensure the proper spending of all grants from the Central Government to the provinces. Suffice it to say that Churchill's reputation as a constitution-maker suffered grievously during

the three days on which he gave evidence before the Joint Select Committee. Not a shred of his utterly reactionary and anti-democratic scheme was left intact. Member after member attacked it, exposed its crooked implications, its distorted perspective, its anti-Indian bias. The witness was again and again compelled to shift his ground, to take recourse in vague generalisations, often to give evasive or contradictory replies or sometimes to decline to give any reply at all, and at least on one occasion to seek the protection of the Chair !

It became evident on the very second day that the usual Churchillian cocksureness was forsaking the witness. He was frequently tripped, riled and nettled and was generally feeling uncomfortable under the merciless barrage of the cross-examination. Here are a few replies he gave to Earl Winterton, which throw light on the temper he gradually developed: To question No. 1—"I think I answered that question, and I must bear in mind the appeal which the Lord Chairman has made against a repetition of questions. I am afraid it covers me also in the repetition of answers." To question No. 2—"My answers have been given and are on the record, and I do not desire to add to them at this moment." To question No. 3—"I have not said anything in any paper which I have written and submitted to this Committee which has raised the question." To question No. 4—"The answer to that is what I have said."

As every counsel knows—and there were a number of eminent counsels in the Committee as well as in the Indian Delegation—the moment a witness loses his temper, it is easy to knock the bottom out of whatever evidence he is leading. Such was the case with Churchill, too. During the first day and for a considerable part of the second day also, the examination was proceeding on the assumption that his Memorandum presented Churchill's alternative scheme of

"reforms." He himself was perfectly amenable to its being so called. But no sooner did he realise to what fate his constitutional freak was being led, than he began to disclaim its paternity altogether! He made a maladroit attempt to trace its descent from the Simon Commission Report: "In the main, all that I have said rests entirely within the scope of the Recommendations of the Statutory Commission, and so you have not a right to brush aside and say these are only the opinions of one man, with a few aged Indian administrators whom he may have consulted."

Soon, however, while replying to Mr. Zafrulla Khan, he was compelled to shift his ground: "I demur altogether to the suggestion that it is my scheme.....I am only making a few modifications upon the Report of the Statutory Commission." Later on, he again made a slight strategic retreat, in reply to the same gentleman, when he said: "I propose certain *derogations* from the Statutory Commission's Recommendations." Even this shield of the Simon Commission Report—its modifications and derogations and perversions notwithstanding—was smashed when at the fag-end of the examination, Major Attlee, who was himself a member of that Commission, acidly remarked: "On that point, I find a great difficulty in recognizing the Simon Report through the mouth of the Right Honourable gentleman!"

The Lilliputians had tied the great Gulliver into knots until he could not move even his little finger. The pygmies had rather enjoyed their encounter with the giant. They had conclusively proved that the giant had feet of clay and the temper of a prima donna who has lost her voice. The rabbits on their part were laughing in their well-laundered sleeves at the bedraggled mane and the tucked-in tail of the lion. Gone was his roar; gone was his air of authority; gone was the scheme with which he had accosted the gather-

ing of the rabbits—his paw raised to strike down all opposition.

"This was the first time," said Mr. Isaac Foot during a subsequent debate in the Commons, "when I have seen any sign of that lack of courage in Churchill." One cannot conceive of a more mortal affront to a descendant of Marlborough! And when on another occasion Churchill made a particularly offensive remark against Indians in a debate in the Commons, he was asked by the same member why he didn't say it before the rabbits themselves!

No wonder Churchill confessed to a friend that he found his presence before the Joint Select Committee rather "an exhausting experience." In fact he would have found it far more exhausting still had not the Archbishop of Canterbury, in his Christian charity, saved him at the end of the third day from further appearance before the Committee. He appealed to the members to join with him "in a self-denying ordinance in agreeing that it is not necessary that we should further press our questions upon Mr. Churchill." And though it would be unfair to impute such a desire to His Grace, the reason he gave for the self-denying ordinance sounds in the layman's ear suspiciously like a parting kick: "I wonder whether there is very much more that we can learn with a view of elucidating such particular proposals as Mr. Churchill has made.....*which, apart from argument, are not many.*"

CHAPTER XV

HERE ENDETH.....

THE mills of the British Government, like those of God, grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small—the hopes and aspirations of a subject people. The spate of constitu-

tional inquiries which began with the appointment of the Simon Commission in 1927 had not subsided even in 1935 ! For seven and a half long years the destinies of one-fifth of the human race were called into question and left dangling between earth and high heaven while committees, commissions and conferences thrived like fungus in the monsoon; declarations were issued by the baker's dozen, and White Papers and Blue Books chased each other in kaleidoscopic succession.

While India was standing with the cup of Tantalus in her hand, trying in vain to slake her thirst for freedom, the world around her was marching by leaps and bounds. Soviet Russia was forging ahead with her Five-Year Plans. China through her very fratricidal struggle was laying the foundation of unity and strength. In Germany a man who, in 1929, was famous mainly for his Charlie Chaplin moustache had, in 1935, as the President, Chancellor and Fuerher of the Reich, torn the treaty of Versailles and thrown its shreds into the startled face of the victors of the Great War.

The British Government, too, was busy all those years with its mission of devising a reform constitution for India. In the pursuit of this noble and majestic task it had issued 25,000 pages of report and 4,000 pages of official reports; the Secretary of State for India and his assistant had delivered 600 speeches; and 15,500,000 words were publicly spoken, written and reported ! In the beginning of creation, says the ancient sacred book, there was the Word. And in the end of the British constitutional inquiry, too, there remained only the Word !

Beginning with the Statutory Commission in 1927, the projected Reforms were, year after year, being ground slowly and exceeding fine through the Three Round Table Conferences and the subsequent Joint Select Committee. All the while Parliament kept a jealous watch upon their

progress through successive stages. When all the other inquiries were over and the Government of India Bill was drafted at last, it had to pass through its own complicated machinery, which is designed as a system of checks and counterbalances. Sir Samuel Hoare had piloted the Bill through its first and second readings and it was due for its third and final reading in the Commons in June 1935.

What was this Government of India Bill which was so long incubating through numerous wombs and which was on the point of seeing the light of day at last? What did it give to India? Why was it opposed by the right as well as the left in Britain and by right, left and centre in India? And if Indians did not want it, why was it rammed down their throats? No better answer to all these queries can be given than by quoting the text of the amendment then tabled by the British Labour Party and moved by Mr. Morgan Jones: "This House declines to assent to the Third Reading of a Bill, which in its establishment of a new constitution for India, does not contain the means for the realisation of Dominion Status, imposes undue restrictions on the exercise of self-government, fails to make adequate provision for the expression and representation of the workers, both men and women, and entrenches in the legislatures the forces of wealth, privilege and reaction." And if more colourful language than this is needed, hear Col. Wedgewood: "We are handing to Indians the mummy of freedom, wrapped round in its cerements, endless bandage after endless bandage—dead for ever!"

There is a Sanskrit proverb about the man who wanted to make an image of God and actually fashioned a monkey out of the clay in his hand. The truth of this ancient saying was bitterly realised in India when they pursued the various clauses of the brand-new Whitehall constitution that was being offered to them. Instead of the image of freedom

they were hoping and praying for, they were presented with the ugly and vicious monkey of the Government of India Bill.

In the homely phrase of the Indian bazaar, in 1929 they had asked Britain for 16 annas in the rupee of freedom. Actually they would have been ready to compromise with 12 annas. The Round Table Conference brought down the demand to eight annas only. The White Paper cut it down to four annas, while the Joint Select Committee further reduced it to two annas in the rupee. The Government of India Bill, however, clinched the bargain on the British side by offering only one anna in the rupee, one quarter of which was to be advanced forthwith in the shape of the so-called provincial autonomy and the payment of the remaining nine pies deferred until such time as the Princes joined the Federation. The remaining fifteen annas in the rupee were for ever forfeited to Britain in the shape of various safeguards, reservations and emergency powers!

No wonder there was a violent revulsion of opinion in India when this ridiculous mouse emerged from the prolonged labour of the mountain. Even those incurable optimists—the Indian Liberals—were disillusioned and outraged by this barefaced sleight of hand. The Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivas Sastri cried out in agony: "No, Sir. It is impossible for the Liberal Party to give an atom of co-operation. Co-operation with friends that wish well of us may be worthwhile, but co-operation with those who have displayed their utmost distrust of us, who do not care for our views and demands and who enact a constitution in utter disregard of our wishes—what is co-operation then, I ask. I would call it suicide." Another Liberal leader is reported to have been provoked into the very un-Liberal-like expression: *Take it back and be damned!*

If this was the tone of moderate opinion in the country,

the reactions of other advanced elements may be easily imagined. The Government of India Bill was described as a fraud, a sham, a swindle, as being humiliating and intolerable. The central scheme was particularly attacked as being wholly unnatural, artificial. No other constitution in the world had a lower federal chamber elected by indirect vote, while the upper was to be filled directly by all the reactionary forces in the country.

Mr. M. A. Jinnah, who had not then made the discovery of Pakistan, launched a bitter attack upon it in the Central Legislative Assembly: "I believe that it means nothing but absolute sacrifice of all that British India has stood for and developed during the last fifty years in the matter of progress in the representative form of Government." He proceeded to summarize the safeguards: "Reserve Bank, Currency, Exchange—nothing doing. Railway Board—nothing doing, mortgaged to the hilt. What is left? Fiscal autonomy convention! Next what is left? Defence, External Affairs–reserved. Finance–it is already mortgaged to the hilt. Our budget and the little that may be there, what do we find?–Special responsibilities of the Governor-General!"

Paradoxically enough, all this criticism was echoed by Churchill in London. One witnessed the amazing spectacle of Congress leaders like the late Mr. Satyamurti quoting Churchill with gusto in the Legislative Assembly, while the latter, on his part, naturally made capital out of the fact that the whole of India was united in repudiating the reforms scheme! Never was there so much identity of views between Indian nationalists and British Diehards as in their hatred of the Government's reforms proposals, though it was a hatred born of diametrically different causes. Extremes had met and made them strange bed-fellows in the campaigns in the two countries, first against the White Paper and subsequently against the Government of India Bill.

Though vanquished in the Joint Select Committee, Churchill proved, like Goldsmith's village schoolmaster, that he could argue still. Whenever the Indian issue came before the Commons, he exhibited an unfailing resourcefulness for raising various alarums and excursions and discovering a series of mare's nests. Indeed, the passage of the reforms proposals through the usual Parliamentary procedure did not so much appear as a tussle between the Government and the Opposition as a marathon match between the Rt. Hon. Member for Epping and the Rest, with the former now stone-walling stubbornly, now trundling stoutly, always on his tip-toes to catch the other side in the wrong.

He knew, of course, that it was a forlorn and hopeless fight and that he was doomed to defeat. He bitterly complained that "every argument offered to the Government was met by vacuous gapes, vacant jeers, and treadmill peregrinations through the lobby." But he never lost heart on that account. If he could not defeat the Reforms, at least he could water down their contents, hamper their progress, put off the evil day of their going on the Statute Book. Churchill's record during 1934-35 will surely entitle him to be called one of the greatest parliamentary filibusters of modern times.

One of the biggest mare's nests discovered by Churchill was regarding the evidence of the Indian section of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce before the Joint Select Committee. In a motion moved in the Commons on April 16, 1934, Churchill made the grave allegation against Sir Samuel Hoare and Lord Derby —both of whom were members of the Committee—that they had tampered with the evidence, originally submitted by the Chamber to the Committee: "A poor, shrunken, emasculated ghost of this evidence was heard on November 4. What had happened to effect changes, which I can prove to be fundamental, during

the interval? The answer is pressure exercised by Sir Samuel Hoare and Lord Derby. The members of the Joint Select Committee are serving in a judicial capacity. Yet here are two members, who have been engaged in procuring changes in the evidence to be presented to them."

This was an extremely serious charge to make and a Committee of Privileges was promptly appointed to investigate it. After prolonged deliberations the Committee came to the unanimous conclusion that neither Sir Samuel Hoare nor Lord Derby was guilty of any crime and misdeamenour against the honour of the House of Commons or the authority of a Select Committee of Parliament. It held that when the Chamber changed their minds, they changed them of their own free will and not on account of any persuasion, over-persuasion or pressure brought to bear upon them from Sir Samuel Hoare or Lord Derby or from the India Office, or from Whitehall or from any other official circles.

Another mare's nest was provided by the publication by a London paper of "the covering memorandum prepared by a delegation of Indian Civil Servants, including two Secretaries to Government, two Judges and one Indian sub-divisional officer on behalf of the Bengal Civil Service." Churchill promptly drew the conclusion from this development that "the whole of this (reforms) policy is viewed with the greatest apprehension and fear, dislike and disapproval by the great mass of the Indian Civil Service." The publication of a confidential document of this nature created something of a sensation. It was soon made clear, however, that it was only one among several drafts considered by the Bengal Branch of the I. C. S., and that it was accepted neither by the Bengal Branch nor by the Central organisation. In view of the frequency with which Churchill confronted the Commons with such revelations and mare's nests, a fellow member caustically commented: "If he

wants to make further use of these revelations, let him publish a new Book of Revelations with the sub-title —Epping Mare's Nests!"

Churchill's attacks gradually reached a crescendo of baffled fury and lurid phraseology. The Bill granted barely one pice of the rupee of freedom. Churchill himself condemned the constitution offered to India as one "the like of which has never been seen in heaven or earth or in the waters under the earth!" Nevertheless, he bitterly resisted the disposal of even one pice in such profligate fashion. One is reminded in this connection of the following story in the *Mahabharata*, the great epic of India.

When the five Pandava brothers returned from their exile, they asked their cousins, the Kauravas, for their rightful kingdom. The latter refused. The Pandavas thereupon agreed to accept only half the kingdom as their share. Still the answer was in the negative. Then the Pandavas, in order to keep up the family peace, asked for five villages wherein they could live. This demand was further boiled down to a single village, a solitary plot of land on which they could settle down. The Kauravas were adamant in their blind selfishness. The eldest of them, Duryodhan, refused to grant to the Pandavas even as much of the earth as could be contained on the point of a needle. This was the genesis of the Epic War—the central theme of the *Mahabharata*—which ultimately resulted in the total extermination of the race of Kuru.

No socner was the Government of India Bill introduced in the House of Commons than Churchill launched his offensive with a motion of adjournment in view of "the momentous rejection by Princes of the Government scheme of Federation." He maintained that the Princes' original agreement to join the Federation formed the linchpin of the Bill and now that the linchpin had been pulled up, the entire

constitutional fabric fell to the ground. "All articulate elements in Indian political life, from the Congress to the Princes, are arraigned against the Bill. Sir Samuel Hoare may try to minimise the differences and promise vaguely further important concessions. We confidently predict that nothing will now change the Princes' resolve to disengage themselves from what they realise is dangerous, and nothing will lead them to quit the solid rock of their treaties with the King-Emperor. It is quite clear that the Federal scheme is dead."

Churchill, however, continued to flog the dead horse with whatever stick came into his hand. He variously posed as the protagonist of the Princes, as the champion of the Indian Civil Service and even as a friend and well-wisher of the Indian nationalists. While he was pleading the cause of the Princes in Parliament and accusing Government of coaxing, cajoling and coercing them to join the Federation, frantic cables were being sent by the Indian Group to the Princes, "to save themselves and India by refusing to associate themselves with the Government policy. They will thus render one more signal service to British rule in India."

Most amusing were the occasions when Churchill assumed the role of a friend of India and condemned the various provisions of a Bill from that angle. "It is not in the least likely to give better Government or greater contentment.....It is a plan for the worst legislature ever submitted to the House.....The electors have been deprived of direct election and the salutary use of dissolution has been robbed of its efficacy. The Assembly will be increasingly hide-bound and stale, while the Second Chamber will be the richest body in the world. It certainly is a Chamber devised to protect the rights of property, not British but Indian property, and strong initiative is not likely to come from it."

Churchill could speak even as a Socialist and condemn the Bill for riveting the shackles of the worst aspects of capitalism on Indian people. With one voice he praised the Princes " for making a common cause with the intelligentsia (to whom he had so contemptuously referred in his Memorandum to the Joint Select Committee) and the public opinion of India," while with another he appealed to them to save themselves and the British rule from the corroding contact with Indian extremists. Churchill had no hesitation even in condemning the safeguards, which were the main target of attack in Indian quarters. He accused Sir Samuel Hoare of professing to give "a form of responsibility which was so hedged round with safeguards, that it was merely a delusion and a snare."

And so the war over the Government of India Bill waxed fast and furious. Churchill fought the Bill reading by reading, section by section, clause by clause, almost letter by letter. He fought it by motions of amendment and adjournment. He fought it in Committee and lobby. He fought it frontally in Parliament and he fought it on the flanks through the press and the platform. The House of Commons watched with bated breath this Homeric duel between the Rt. Hon. Member for Epping and the serried ranks of the Government benches.

It cheered his brilliant perorations ; it clapped his scintillating sallies of wit ; it laughed at his coruscating flashes of sarcasm ; it trembled at the flesh-creeping visions he invoked—and it always voted against him ! Whenever he rose, the House bowed low before the blast and let the Churchillian periods thunder past ; but no sooner did he sit down than it turned again to the prosaic clauses of the Bill before it.

When the Bill came before the Commons for its third reading, on the 5th of June 1935, Churchill knew he was a

beaten man. He struck a sombre note when he rose to deliver his swan-song. He confessed that the struggle to which he had devoted five long years of his life, and for which he was always ready "to sacrifice his time, labour and, in some cases personal friendship," had proved totally unavailing. "I am ready to admit that all the forces of the National Government and all the machinery, prestige and loyalties of the Conservative Party—used contrary to its instincts and traditions—have proved too strong for us." Then he proceeded to recapitulate the numerous arguments which he had time and again advanced against the Indian constitutional proposals of the Government. He professed surprise that the Government were obstinately pressing forward with the Bill "when the domestic situation was so uncertain, and Europe was drifting steadily nearer the brink of catastrophe."

He then adroitly utilised the unanimous Indian opposition to damn the Bill: "We have been repeatedly told of the necessity of Indian consent to any proposals. It was for this reason that the late Socialist Government deserted the Simon Commission. It was for this reason that the Round Table Conference was set up in the hope of getting consent. It was for this reason that Mr. Gandhi was coaxed and wheedled over here to take his place at the Round Table. It was for this reason that the Indian Moderates were so carefully nursed for that position on the Joint Select Committee.....They were unfortunately thrown out at the first election when the proposals were made known."

From this vantage point it was easy to push the Government on to the horns of a dilemma. "Either a scheme must make for a better government or it must command the agreement of those for whom it is devised. Either we must have a good system or we must have acceptance. Our case is that His Majesty's Government now have neither. Everyone has the worst of both worlds."

The smell of battle soon rose into the nostrils of the old war-horse. Gone was his initial defeatist mood. He snorted defiantly: "In the name of liberty, you have done what liberty disowns. In the name of theoretical progress, you have opened the door for practical retrogation. In the name of appeasement and the popular will, you have prescribed a course of endless irritation. In response to the Indian public opinion, you have supplied what all Indians—all shades of Indian public opinion—repudiate...You have unsettled everything. You have settled nothing. Those whom you sought to conciliate are those whom you have most offended. Those, to whom your mission is most necessary, are those whom you have most entirely abandoned. Those, on whom you have to count most, are those whom you are teaching least of all to count on you."

Churchill had established his grip on the subject as well as on the House. In ringing words he prophesied nothing but disaster for the Act. "I think it is a short-sighted Act. I am sure it is a wrongful Act. It is a fraud upon power and a malversation of political trust." He accused the Government of saddling the poverty-striken Indian masses with new heavy expenditure for "a political excursion in a Western char-a-banc." As for the political classes, "By every organ through which they can express their views, they reject your government and they spit upon your ill-conceived generosity, if generosity it be. Even the very classes of wealthy, small, unrepresentative minorities for whom you have set out to cater, have rejected the dish which you proffer to them."

On the lips of a rhetorician like Churchill, his very swan-song turned into a war-cry. Even in the moment of defeat, he appealed to his supporters to keep a vigilant eye on the working of the new constitution, and warned the government that his opposition was by no means at an end. With this aggressive gesture he paid a parting tribute to Sir

Samuel Hoare, "who has reached today the day of triumph; but all his activities, industry and trouble he had put on himself and others, had added nothing valuable to the conclusions of the Simon Commission." He reminded the Secretary of State for India of the conversation between the Wedding Guest and the Ancient Mariner and bade him adieu in the former's ominous words :

> "*God save thee, ancient Mariner !*
> *From the fiends, that plague thee thus ! —*
> *Why look'st thou so ?*"—"*With my cross-bow*
> *I shot the Albatross.*"

"Sir Samuel has carried this monumental Bill and won a victory for which he fought so long and adroitly. He has won his victory. But is it not a victory for the interests of this country, nor a victory for the welfare of the peoples of India, and in the crashing cheers, which no doubt will hail his majority to-night, we pray there may not mingle the knell of the British Empire in the East."

The 55-minutes oratorical *tour de force* came to an end at 5.49 p.m. in a hushed House. Hardly had its echoes died down, when dapper little Leo Amery rose and intoned with puckish solemnity : *Here endeth the last chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah !*.....

The spell cast by Churchill was broken. The tension dissolved in peals of laughter. The House heaved an audible sigh of relief that it was all over. Almost gleefully the Members trooped into the voting lobbies. The Speaker declared at 10.58 p. m. that the Ayes had it, the figures being 386 to 122.

The House of Commons had passed the third reading of the Goverment of India Bill and the Honourable Members were glad that they had done with India. And India was glad that whatever her fate might be under the new Act, she had done with Churchill. —Or so she thought !

CHAPTER XVI

BEWARE! PANDITS AND MAHATMAS!

IT is one of the finest political conventions of British public life that party warfare on a particular measure is brought to an end no sooner than that measure has passed through the various constitutional channels and found a place on the Statute Book.

Indeed, this can be said to be the secret of the successful functioning of the British or, for the matter of that, any democracy. After the fierce Reform Bill controversy in 1867, Lord Salisbury laid the sound dictum : "It is the duty of every Englishman and of every English party to accept a political defeat cordially and to lend their best endeavours to secure the success, or to neutralise the evil of the principles to which they have been forced to succumb. England has committed many mistakes as a nation in the course of her history, but the mischief has been more than corrected by the heartiness with which, after each great struggle, victors and vanquished have forgotten their former battles and have continued together to lead the new policy to its best results."

Though Churchill prides himself upon being a faithful Parliamentarian, so great was his hatred of the Indian constitutional reforms that he decided to ignore Lord Salisbury's salutary advice and to continue his opposition to Government even after the Commons had passed the third reading of the Government of India Act by an overwhelming majority. That it was not a momentary aberration is evident from the fact that he had expressed his resolve to do so long before the Bill came for its final reading before the Commons. At a public meeting held under the auspices of the "India Defence League"—a more diehard successor of the "Indian Empire Society", many of whose members had supported the India Bill—Churchill said :

"The Bill is dead. It is as dead as mutton. But nevertheless the Government assures us that it must be placed on the statute book. The corpse must be carried forward as a trophy.....We have months of fighting yet before us and after that there will be a fight in the House of Lords led by Lord Salisbury. I trust the Bill will come back to the House with a goodly stock of amendments. Much may happen in these critical months. Do not lose heart. Now is the time we are going to reap the result of our long uphill fight. Many things may happen in the central organisation of the Government in the next four or five months. We may have a new Prime Minister. If we do, then will be the moment when we should ask that Conservative opinion shall be considered as a whole."[1]

Similarly, in the very act of facing his Waterloo in the House of Commons during the third reading of the Bill, Churchill was contumaciously looking forward to the continuation of his struggle against it, regardless of all Parliamentary conventions. He had an ingenious explanation to offer for such an attitude: "The Bill is not instantaneous in its action. There is no day on which it can be said that it will come into operation. It may be a year or it may be two years before the provinces can be handed over. It may be five years or it may be more before the assent of the Princes is procured or before other conditions, precedent to the inauguration of Federal Home Rule, such as conditions of financial solvency have been efficiently established.

"The interpretation which will be placed upon those conditions will obviously be most important. That is why it is necessary that those who feel that all those step should be watched with the greatest vigilance, should remain in company and should endeavour to limit and mitigate, as far

1 Albert Hall, March 21, 1935

as they can, the evils which we feel are now let loose upon the State. In the House of Commons we are in a majority so large than we can be sullenly or superciliously voted down. It is possible that in the new Parliament we may be a larger proportion of your forces than we are now and that consequently you may be more inclined to pay attention to us."

This heterodoxy born of sheer malice shocked the House, coming as it did from the mouth of a member of the standing and the eminence of Churchill. In his concluding speech Sir Thomas Inskip, the Attorney General, gravely commented upon the foregoing observations: "Nothing could be more damaging to constitutional government than that, when this House has ratified a particular proposal, there should be carried on a sort of guerilla warfare to embitter relations between this country and India." Apart from this constitutional aspect of the question, it cannot be denied that Churchill showed consummate generalship in chalking out his future strategy.

The Government of India Act, which was in gestation for seven long years, took another two years to be put into execution and then, too, only as far as its provincial provisions were concerned. This is extremely significant in view of the fact that it was against Federation that Churchill had concentrated all his attack. Indeed, in the Committee stage of the Government of India Bill, he had made a sporting offer to Sir Samuel Hoare to withdraw his opposition altogether if only the latter dropped the Federal provisions from the Bill. During the final reading Churchill again made it clear that he had not the intention to obstruct the setting of Provincial Governments under the Bill and that it was only against Federation that he would continue to fight whatever be the verdict to the House.

When the Bill returned to the Commons on July 30

with a "goodly stock of amendments" from the House of Lords, as anticipated, Churchill was of course ready to give them a big hand and to indulge in some more fireworks against the Bill as also against the Government. This sniping was in keeping with the declaration he had made during the third reading and was more a gesture of defiance than intended to have any practical effect. Discretion, if not despair, seems, however, to have dawned upon the India Defence League once the Bill had received the Royal assent. Though it is not known whether the League passed a voluntary decree of dissolution, Churchill at any rate made the somewhat belated decision to follow the parliamentary convention and to bury the Indian hatchet for the time being.

He wrote to the Chairman of the West Essex Unionist Association that a new situation had arisen with the passage of the Act, after the greatest and most thorough discussion upon the Indian policy that had ever taken place since the eighteenth century. "The measure has become law. I cannot recede in any respect from the warnings which we have given of the effects of the new constitution upon the relations of the Hindus and Muslims, upon the efficiency of all the services which minister to the well-being of the Indian masses, and upon the trade and goodwill between Britain and her Indian Empire. If, unhappily, these forecasts are borne out by events, we shall naturally remain free to comment upon them in the light of the warnings we have given.....But other tasks now lie before us. Dangers larger and nearer than Indian dangers gather upon our path .....We have to provide for the defence and safety of the country and the Empire which depends upon it.....We have to play our part with other nations in maintaining the peace of the world. Amid such circumstances it seems to me that Lord Salisbury's memorable words and doctrine should be our guide."

In 1935, dangers did lie in Britain's and the world's path, far more portentous than those which even the overheated imagination of Churchill could visualise as ever likely to befall her in India. There was indeed no manner of comparison between the Nazi Frankenstein's monster in Germany and the half-naked fakir, who had then retired from the Indian National Congress. Hitler was merrily driving a coach and four through the various clauses of the Treaty of Versailles and in May of that year instituted compulsory military service, thus smashing its main sanction. In September the notorious Nuremburg laws were passed and the anti-Jewish drive was intensified with all the power of the state behind it.

In October, Mussolini invaded Abyssinia and gave the death-blow to the League of Nations. The cloud, which was no bigger than a man's hand at the beginning of the decade, had thus assumed catastrophic proportions in its middle and the men who were guiding Britain's destinies during those fateful years.—Macdonald, Baldwin and Chamberlain—were too myopic and easygoing to be able to cope with the menace. In 1935 Macdonald made his exit from the political scene and Baldwin became Prime Minister. But he soon proved that he "was decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent."

The Prophet Jeremiah who had put *Finis* to the last chapter of his "Book of Woes" on India had needs to begin—with far more justification—his "Book of Warnings" on Europe. It is true that Churchill did show a tendency to flirt with Fascism in its intial stages, which was of course in keeping with his Tory background. But it gradually dawned upon him that Fascism was not merely the enemy of freedom and democracy but that it menaced the existence of the older, sated Imperialisms. Sooner or later the German

struggle for a place in the sun was bound to clash with the British Empire on which the sun never set. Hitler may plead his anxiety for a lasting rapprochement with England and thus delude men like Baldwin and Chamberlain.

Churchill, however, was quick to perceive—he was the first among the British ruling class to do so—that such an alliance between Fascism in the first evil vigour of its youth and a contented and senile Imperialism would inevitably spell the doom of the latter. This lively appreciation of the latent danger to the British Empire, rather than any ideological affinities or spiritual awakening, was primarily responsible for ranging Churchill against the Fascist dictators, at a time when they were being fawned upon and wooed by the British and French Governments.

It may be that once he threw himself into the fight, he was carried away by his usual exuberance and was uplifted by the very heat of the battle beyond the narrow reasoning which had first prompted his action. Vincent Sheean, who had an opportunity to come into close contact with Churchill during this period, writes:

"1935 to 1939 were the precise years in which he was traversing this immense ideological area and it was then that his mind was tempered for the supreme crisis. When I first talked to him about Spain he was pro-Franco and greatly concerned over Russian intervention; when I last talked to him (just before the fall of the Spanish Republic) he was saddened and made solemn by the whole thing, perceived the importance of victory for Hitler and Mussolini and regarded the fall of the Republic as a blow to England. And with respect to Russia, and most of all with respect to India, these two years produced in him such an extraordinary process of ageing and tempering that he could hardly be recognised in 1942, as the man who had once thumbed his nose gaily at the whole world outside the British Isles."[1]

1 *Between The Thunder and The Sun* p. 46

Unfortunately, Churchill had been crying *Wolf—Wolf* so long and so vociferoulsy in connection with the lamb-like Gandhi and his non-violent followers, that nobody took him seriously when a pack of real wolves strode on the scene in the shape of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi gangsters. Prophet Jeremiah's "Book of Warnings" on Europe had, generally speaking, as cold a reception as his earlier "Book of Woes" on India. His purblind fellow-Tories must have often nudged each other and said *sotto voce*, when Churchill rose to deliver his frequent adjurations against German rearmament in the Commons: *Here's Winston going off the deep end again!*

In spite of all such appeals and protests, the British Government continued its rake's progress. Even the British public was too apathetic to take either the Fascists, or Churchill's warnings against their menace to the peace of the world, seriously. One wonders whether Churchill has ever realised the bearing which Aesop's fable of old had upon his career in this striking fashion!

Let us return from the larger European issues, in which Churchill was then engrossing himself, to India which he had left to God and the Government of India Act in 1935. It will be remembered that in the letter he wrote to the West Essex Unionist Association he reserved the right of commenting upon any event which might bear out any of his forecasts. There is only a single recorded instance of his having exercised this right between 1935, when he sounded the "cease fire", and 1939, when he returned to the Cabinet on the morrow of the world war.

The occasion was provided by the constitutional impasse which had arisen in India in 1937 over the refusal of the Congress, which had swept the polls in six out of eleven Provinces in the very first elections held under the Act, to accept office without a gentleman's agreement, that the

Governors would not exercise their reserve power in the day-to-day administration. This impasse was subsequenlty solved to everybody's satisfaction by the personal negotiations between the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, and Gandhi; but meanwhile, Churchill thought the subject of sufficient importance to devote to it one of his fortnightly articles, which he contributed to the *Evening Standard* between 1936 and 1939, and which were later collected together in the famous volume *Step by Step.*

Churchill began his article, which appeared under the title "The New Phase In India" on April 16, 1937, with the observation that Indian events were beginning to cause anxiety in wide circles in Britain and proceeded :

"A gigantic process of gathering the votes of an electorate of thirty million Indians spread over an immense sub-continent, many of them dwelling under primitive conditions, has passed with smoothness and efficiency. The electoral machinery has worked better than many of its designers expected. The results have, however, seriously disconcerted them. Those who said during the passage of the Act that the Congress Party would be supreme were disbelieved and brushed aside. But now we see that the Congress Party is powerful everywhere, and all-powerful in six of the eleven Provinces of India. Even in Madras, which, it was believed almost without dispute, would return a moderate Liberal legislature, the Congress nominees have swept the board. They claim to speak in the name of an enormous majority of the Indian electorate. They can govern, at any time they choose, the greater part of India."

Churchill then gave his own version of the impasse : "They now refuse to take office without assurances from the Provincial Governors that the fundamental safeguards, without which Parliament would never have passed the Act, will be set aside.....As soon as the Assemblies meet we shall

see the beginning in every province of the same kind of constitutional conflict which scarred the history of England in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. On every side Governors, armed with the prerogatives of ancient kings, will be confronted with the agitation of the modern parliaments.

"The Congress has declared its united resolve to make the constitution unworkable and to court, or even in some cases to create, an absolute deadlock. The stop-gap Ministries will be humiliated, chased from power, or reduced to impotence or servility. On the other hand, the Government of every Province must be carried on from week to week, and the Governors have ample powers in law *and in fact* to enable them to discharge this prime responsibility. Such is the crude, harsh issue which is now emerging."

Next follows an interesting aside upon Jawaharlal Nehru. Churchill's references to Nehru are infrequent but always incisive, as may be easily imagined. Only once before, in 1931, had he alluded to Nehru at some length when he called him "Gandhi's young rival in the Indian Congress, (who is) preparing to supersede Gandhi, the moment that he has squeezed his last drop from the British lemon."

Six years afterwards, Churchill dubbed Nehru "Communist, revolutionary, most capable and implacable of the enemies of the British connection with India," and quoted his "hard declaration": "It is as clear as the noonday sun that our paths lie in different directions. There is nothing in common between us, and we shall go along our path resolutely and with a will to put an end to this bogus Act which has been forced upon us." The article continues: "But now comes forward Mr. Gandhi with smooth and specious words. 'Why imperil,' he pleads in effect, 'this great experiment of self-government for the sake of legal

pedantry? Let us have a "gentleman's agreement" to explain away and remove from practical politics these galling statutory safeguards. Then you will reap your rich reward.'

"These barbed blandishments are reinforced from British-Indian quarters by arguments of practical expediency. The Congress, it is said, gained their majority by making large promises to the electorates. To fulfil these promises would split their party. To refuse to take office and throw the blame for all disappointed hopes upon the wicked English and their "bogus constitution," keeps the party united and their electorate behind them, and thus builds up the forces which will be required in the impending struggle. To frustrate these schemes, it is said, the remedy is to force the Congress men, as they are now called, to assume the responsibility of office. The constitution therefore must be so interpreted that the reserve powers on which Parliament, even in its most facile mood, insisted should be allowed to lapse."

Churchill's reactions to this were not in doubt: "It is to a different England or Britain that these appeals are now directed. Here is an England which feels in all conscience that it has done its best for the Indian political classes. It will stand by its word in spirit and in letter; but it will go no further. It will enter upon no new slippery slope. Britain has done her best. Others now must make their sincere contribution. Besides all this, we are in a different climate of opinion. The dangerous slothfulness of two or three years ago has passed. The mood of pacifism is gone. Britain is arming on a gigantic scale. The gravity of the European situation presses upon men's minds. There is a sterner temper in the air."

Finally, the conclusion recalls the typical perorations of the Albert Hall meetings held under the auspices of the

Indian Empire Society or the Indian Defence Group: "Meanwhile as if to strike a note of realism to Pandits, Mahatmas and those who now claim to speak for the helpless Indian masses, the Frontier is astir; and British officers and soldiers are giving their lives to hold back from the cities and peace-time wealth of India the storm of Pathan inroad and foray."

I have quoted extensively from the article because it is the last unofficial pronouncement of Churchill on the Indian problem. Considering this and the fact that it was written midway between the passing of the Government of India Act in 1935 and his return to the Cabinet in 1939, it has considerable significance. It emphatically repudiates Vincent Sheean's thesis that during that period Churchill was undergoing "an extraordinary process of ageing and tempering"—at any rate as far as India was concerned.

On the contrary, it conclusively proves that his "period of restraint" and "punctilious silence" had only hardened and ossified his views and driven his hatred of the Congress still deeper. Notice the cheap sneer at Pandits and Mahatmas in the last paragraph. *The Frontier is astir !*

Perhaps Churchill did not know that the Frontier, too, had its own Gandhi, then—Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the beloved *Fakhr-e-Sarhad.* The Frontier was astir and in an unconscious flash-back of his mind, Churchill was still fighting, after forty years, the Pathan inroad and foray on the familiar hills of Malakand.....

CHAPTER XVII

PRIME MINISTER

IT may be the merest coincidence that the Federal part of the Government of India Act, 1935, died an unnatural death within eight days of Churchill's joining the British Cabinet

on September 3, 1939, but it is a coincidence which makes one smell a rat.

For all one knows, the First Lord of the Admiralty might have been too busy in the first hectic week of the war in taking back into his hands the threads of the office, which he had to leave under a cloud twenty-four years before, to pay any attention to distant India. Nevertheless, one cannot but recall in this connection his oft-repeated resolution not to serve in any Administration about whose Indian policy he was not assured.

It would not be far-fetched to suggest that such an assurance was implicit in Churchill's acceptance of office under Chamberlain, particularly because the latter had never evinced any interest in India. On the other hand, Lord Linlithgow had often professed himself to be keen on inaugurating the Federal constitution, and was in his own ponderous manner busy for three years in persuading a sufficient number of Princes to sign on the dotted line. As he observed in his address to the Joint Session of the Central Legislature on September 11, 1939, though great labour had been lavished on them, "we have no choice but to hold in suspense the work in connection with preparations for Federation, while retaining Federation as our objective."

Leaving aside that pious wish, one would have thought that instead of suddenly throwing overboard all "the well-advanced preparation" of four long years and thus perpetuating the hybrid mating of the 1919-model irresponsible centre with the 1935-model provincial autonomy, Lord Linlithgow would have pushed ahead and swiftly finished the job which was hanging so long on his hands. The war, instead of providing an argument against Federation, should have served rather as the greatest spur towards it. Either those who were responsible for it were insincere hypocrites,—it is hard to believe that Lord Linlithgow

was so—or some overwhelming pressure must have been brought to bear upon them to desist from the completion of the work.

Did that pressure come from Churchill? Was it the price which Chamberlain paid for winning over his most formidable critic? Though Churchill had grudgingly acquiesced in the institution of provincial autonomy, he remained as implacable an opponent as ever of Federation, and it is not at all improbable that he should have made its suspension a condition precedent of his joining the War Cabinet.

The Viceroy could suspend Federation but he could not suppress the demand for freedom—not while every political leader was profusely proclaiming his support for the Allied cause! The Indian National Congress was the first to recover from the shock of war and the gush of sympathy and loyalty which followed it. In the historic resolution it passed on September 14, the Congress Working Committee invited the British Government "to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and Imperialism and the new order that is envisaged; in particular how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect to in the present."

Now it was extremely unfair—almost hitting below the belt—to ask such questions of a Government which, far from knowing its war aims, had the vaguest realization of the war itself. Chamberlain was sure of winning victory simply by sitting tight, observing the Sabbath and counting the barrels of oil which Hitler did not possess. Lord Zetland, the then Secretary of State for India, tried his best to answer the Congress in a half-patronising, half-offended manner: "The Congress leaders are men animated by burning patriotism but they do, I think, sometimes lose sight, while lifting the eyes to the stars, of the practical difficulties which stand

in the way on the ground at their feet.....It is somewhat unfortunate that they should have chosen this time to reassert their claims."

Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, was more conscientious and clever. He rounded up all the tailors from all the Tooley Streets in India and proceeded to interview them on *their* war aims! The result of all those marathon talks was embodied in a statement running into 5,000 words, whose sentences rose in tiers like the seats of a stadium and whose meaning became more and more obscure the further one read. In response to the Congress demand, His Excellency had generously offered another Round Table Conference after the end of the war and a Consultative Group before it. Consultation and Conference! Who said Freedom and Democracy ?

The Congress asked for bread and got a stone. It had no other alternative but to advise its Ministries to resign as a protest. The Government on its part promptly invoked. Section 93 of the 1935 Act and suspended the Constitution. The naked autocracy of British Governors was installed in six out of the eleven provinces of India. The life of provincial autonomy had proved shorter than the labour that preceded its birth, while the Federation was not even still-born : It was only the false alarm of a delicate condition !

Churchill must have breathed a deep sigh of relief. It was only human if he felt happy and proud to see all his forebodings coming true one after another, almost in the order that he had foretold. Though he was in no way directly connected with them. the political developments in India were following a pattern entirely after his own heart. The hated Act of 1935 was at last dead—at least the whole of its Federal and 6/11th of the Provincial part. He knew all along that it would fall to pieces at the first impact of crisis. The best thing of all was that the revolutionary Congressmen

had walked out of the provincial governments in a huff. They were, after all, dangerous elements to be entrusted with ruling powers in the provinces at a time when the British Empire was at war. Gandhi's was at any rate a good riddance. Very good, indeed !

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah had unexpectedly reached a happy ending. But it was not given to him to savour the satisfaction of the fulfilment of his prophecies for long. In April 1940 came the debacle of Norway and almost overnight the phoney war transformed itself into a war of life and death. Chamberlain was arraigned in the Commons as the person primarily responsible for bringing Britain to the brink of the abyss. Churchill stood loyally by his Chief and gave a vigorous defence of the Norwegian campaign. It was of no avail. The Prime Minister knew that his days were numbered, and Hitler's invasion of the Low Countries only precipitated his exit. On Friday, May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill kissed hands on his appointment as the Prime Minister and the First Lord of the Treasury.

India may well have expressed her reactions to this turn of events in the words used by James Maxton on that occasion. It was written in the book of fate, say perhaps on the battlefield of Plassey, or maybe on the parade ground of Bangalore, that the man who had proved himself the most implacable enemy of her political progress, who indeed had again and again insisted that India could not hope to attain even Dominion Constitution "in any period which human beings ought to take into practical account," should be called upon to preside over her destinies during the war of freedom against Fascism.

In the speech he delivered while moving the vote of confidence, Churchill did not make any reference to India, let alone vouchsafe her any word of reassurance regarding the future. But his enunciation of the policy and aims of

his Government had a significance, which was not lost upon India.

"You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crimes. That is our policy.

"You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realized; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move towards its goal."

Victory, for without victory there would be no survival of the British Empire! So that was what India was being asked to fight for. There was an exquisite irony in the spectacle of an ingrained Imperialist like Churchill standing at the head of the democratic nations of the world to lead them in the greatest battle of history. It was rubbed in by "that wicked man" Hitler himself when he said that if Britain were really sincere about her professions, she would forthwith make India free. Was the new Prime Minister conscious of the irony? Would Churchill the man triumph over Churchill the Imperialist? Would he redeem the future by rising above his past? Would he rally all the progressive elements in the world behind him and thus make it really a war of democracy and freedom?

Such questions rose in our hearts but froze on our lips as the fearful events in Europe unreeled themselves before our eyes in breath-taking succession. The world was verily crashing around our ears. The Dutch Government capitulating even before it could marshal its army in battle array. The Nazi legions sweeping like a river of lava over Belgium. The

break-through at Sedan—the signpost to doom!.....The *Blitzkrieg* sweeping like a conflagration over France. Proud and beautiful Paris, the nursery of freedom, itself echoing the *Seig Heil!—Seig Heil!!* of the all-conquering hordes of Hitler. With Vienna, Prague and Warsaw, Paris too had passed into the totalitarian night. The very light of Western civilization seemed to flicker and fade.....

Above the crash of kingdoms and the lamentations of millions, above the deafening roar of the *Stukas* and the sickening crunch of the *Panzers* rose clear and resonant the voice of Winston Churchill. Winston Churchill, speaking not for the British Empire but for the liberties of mankind. Winston Churchill standing in the ruins around him and proclaiming in imperishable words that the spirit of human freedom will never die. Winston Churchill, defying bare-handed all the mechanised might of the dictators. Winston Churchill, seizing the majestic impulse of a moment and telling the dazed French people that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations but one Franco-British Union.

Winston Churchill was the man of the hour—the man who was adding cubits to his stature before our very eyes—the man whose flaming phrases were finding an echo in the heart of every freedom-loving man and woman all over the world. For a time, in the face of the armageddon which was mounting to its unpredictable climax, India forgot her private quarrel with Churchill, suppressed her doubts and fears, held in suspense her own long-cherished hopes.

"If the British Government will not *suo motu* declare India a free country," wrote Gandhi in his *Harijan*, "I am of opinion that we should wait till the heat of the battle in the heart of the Allied countries subsides and the future is clearer than it is. We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin." And Nehru declared that it would be an

act derogatory to India's honour to take the least advantage of Britain's hour of peril.

The future gradually began to become clearer. The Battle of France was lost, but the Battle of Britain was being decisively won. The mortal peril in which Britain stood after the fall of France began to recede from the white ciiffs of Dover. But in Churchill's plentitude of power, from the centre of the world stage where he then stood in sublime splendour, there issued forth no words of hope or cheer into the straining ears of India, no olive branch into her eager, outstretched hand. The orator of free men was ominouly mute when it came to the 400 million people of India. Maybe he was too busy attend-ind to a hundred and one pressing things which needed his immediate attention. One wondered whether he was even informed that in its anxiety to play its part in the struggle for world freedom, the Indian National Congress had in July 1940 dropped its beloved pilot, had even discarded its sheet-anchor of non-violence in order to take arms against the aggressor.

It is a melancholy reflection. But what would have been the situation in India and the standing of Churchill through-out the world to-day, had he then come out with an un-reserved declaration of Indian independence on the lines of that of the United States on the Philippines and thus enlisted her (in Edward Thompson's expressive phrase) for freedom ? Where would Britain and India be to-day, had Churchill then come to the microphone and said to India, as he was to say to Russia a year later : "No one has been a more consistent opponent of your freedom than I have been for the last twenty-five years ! I will unsay not a word that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. The past, with its crimes, even follies, and its tragedies, flashes away."

The past did not flash away. The white man's burden, the obsession of the Empire, the sheer fascination of the brightest gem in the British Crown did not flash away from Churchill's mind. They hold him in their evil grip. India had to suffer during the succeeding four years more crimes and follies and tragedies than she had witnessed during the preceding forty. While yet engaged in the life-and-death struggle against the Nazi monster, Churchill, like Cadmus of old, is sowing dragons' teeth in the soil of Hindostan.

CHAPTER XVIII

JACOB'S VOICE; ESAU'S HANDS

IT is an amazing fact that Churchill, who spent five long years of his life in campaigning against the Government of India Bill, has not spoken even five times on the Indian issue since becoming the Prime Minister, the only occasion when he delivered what may be called a full-dress speech being on September 10, 1942, just after the Quit India convulsion. During the first sixteen months of his Premiership he did not so much as refer to India even once, his vow of silence being broken when in September 1941, probably on the spur of the moment, he gave a categorical *No* in reply to the question whether the Atlantic Charter applied to India.

One overwhelming reason of Churchill's present silence over India must be the belief that he had, after all, spoken more than enough during the thirties. The time had come in the forties to act, the opportunity as the Prime Minister to accomplish what he had vainly pleaded for as a private and somewhat lonely member. Prophet Jeremiah

had become the mighty Caesar whose word was law, whose wish was a command, and whose pleasure could move an Empire. And by a supreme irony the very person who had finally vanquished him in 1935 had become his loyal instrument in 1940. Winston Churchill could well afford to remain silent on India when he had as Secretary of State for India a man like Colonel Leopold Amery to do all the talking, and a Viceroy like Lord Linlithgow to do all the acting for him. The Amery-Linlithgow axis could be trusted to keep India safe for Churchill.

Indians are a charitable people and though they knew Amery's antecedents well—was he not the gentleman who had once espoused the cause of Japan because "she was only defending herself against Chinese nationalism?"—they held their judgment in suspense when Churchill appointed him the Secretary of State for India. Besides, he was given a good character certificate by a paper like the *Manchester Guardian*, and the Cromwellian manner in which he had bade Chamberlain to depart had endeared him to many. The accident of his being born in India was also a factor in his favour and he made a good beginning at the India Office when he told an Indian journalist: "You can tell India that every ounce of my energy will be directed towards seeking an agreement with leaders of Indian opinion."

The four years of Amery's stewardship would have fulfilled this assurance if only he had said *disagreement* instead of *agreement!* His very first official pronouncement drew the caustic comment from Nehru that it had no relation to facts either in Europe or in India. And since then there has not been a single occasion when Amery has opened his mouth and not put his foot into it! If Linlithgow's pontifical speeches cloyed one, Amery's staccato utterances grate upon one's nerves. The crowning achievement of Amery was the famous declaration he made in August 1940, and

since then his main job has been to paraphrase it in as many ways and to repeat it as many times as possible.

Amery's speeches since 1940 are reminiscent of the speeches delivered in the House of Commons during the war of American Independence. No further negotiations with rebels! No further constitutional advance without unity! And all the while his words have been helpful only to foster disunity, and to provoke even loyal citizens into a rebellious frame of mind.

However, in holding Amery solely responsible for the present deplorable state of affairs we are hardly fair to him. The voice that emanates from the India Office is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. All the developments of the last four years bear the unmistakable stamp of Churchill. They reveal the projection of his pet prejudices and the application of all the drastic remedies prescribed by him earlier.

Amery has only constituted himself the conscience-keeper of Churchill on the Indian issue and the decoy to draw off fire from his Chief. He faithfully executes his orders, and loyally covers his lapses. Amery is at once the alibi as well as the advocate of Churchill as far as India is concerned. When the latter made the grievous blunder of denying the Atlantic Charter to India, pat came Amery's explanation that its principles were being applied in the Indian Ocean long before the Charter itself was born in the Atlantic!

Even the August Declaration, though it may have been drafted by Amery and delivered by Linlithgow, reveals on close analysis the hairy hands of Esau. Its main clause may well have been lifted from one of the fire-eating speeches delivered by Churchill in the Albert Hall: "It goes without saying that the British Government could not contemplate the transfer of the present responsibilities for

the peace and the welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life, nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government." This carries the policy of "Divide and rule" to its logical conclusion and mortgages the future of a people to the hands of a few intractable persons acting on their own or as the puppets of the Imperial Power.

Constitutionalists may well wonder whether *a system of Government* can by itself have any authority and, if it has, how it can be denied by anybody, or whether it is at all possible to devise a system of Government which will receive cent per cent support. Does the system mean federation or democracy or the particular system which was devised after prolonged labours by the British Parliament and which was embodied in the Government of India Act 1935, one half of which remained unborn and the other half lay dead in 1940? Or, to cut the cackle and to come to the hosses, does the system refer to the system which Churchill and a few diehards had opposed tooth and nail for five long years of their life, the system which in spite of all its checks and safeguards had put the Indian National Congress into power, and had thus invested its claim to speak in the name of the Indian masses with unchallengeable authority?

Churchill never took any part in the various debates on India held in the House of Commons during 1940 and 1941. He left it entirely to Amery to bear the responsibility for Indian affairs in the eyes of the House and also of the world at large. It was a shrewd decision in view of Churchill's past record on India being universally suspect. Amery on his part discharged his duties with untiring perseverance and stoical fortitude in the face of bitter criticism. In an unguarded moment in April 1941, however, he

blurted out that "the policy of the Government announced last autumn offers India far more than ever before, and the remarkable thing is that it is the policy not merely of the Labour Members of the Cabinet or of the present Secretary of State *but of the Prime Minister*."

To my mind the really remarkable thing is that even after this revelation, poor Mr. Amery should have been compelled to bear the brunt of abuse for all the British Government's sins of omission and commission in India. It may be perhaps because his speeches aggravate the evil effects of those sins. At times one may even condone a particular sin itself as an inevitable result of the present circumstances; but "the sombre frenzy of a dervish of the desert," with which Amery defends and justifies every single omission and commission of the Government always drives one mad. In India Amery's name has long since become anathema and his departure from the India Office will come as a deliverance.

Of late even British opinion has become increasingly hostile to him. The *Daily Herald* castigated him as neither measuring up to the emergency nor grasping the opportunity. The *News Chronicle* declared that the first step towards ending the Indian deadlock was to get rid of Amery. Pethick Lawrence declared in the Commons that Amery was totally unfit for the job. And Fenner Brockway in an open letter in the *New Leader* addressed Amery the same words which the latter had done to Chamberlain: "You've sat here too long for any good you've been doing. Depart, I say, and let's have done with you. In the name of God, go!"

In the name of Churchill, Amery won't go, even though he may personally like to wash his hands of a thankless task. Indeed it was reported long ago that Amery himself had asked Churchill to relieve him, in view of his health.

Churchill's loyalty to his friends is well-known and the more the agitation for Amery's retirement, the firmer will be the former's confidence in him. It is significant that Amery is perhaps the only member of Churchill's first Cabinet who has stuck to the same office during all those years, though none else has made such a hash of his work. "To enter the India Office," wrote a correspondent of the *New York Times*, "is to feel that one is utterly cut off from the global strife. It is about as lively as a dusty old curiosity shop on any London by-street."

It *is* an old curiosity shop dealing in the curios of India. Spectacled, skull-capped, sour-looking, sharp-tongued Leopold Charles Maurice Stennet Amery may stand at its counter but through the swing door leading to the inner sanctum one can always catch a glimpse of the gruff visage of the senior partner, Winston Churchill. Among the various posters which adorn the mouldering cobweb-covered walls of the shop are "Fixed Policy," "Take It Or Leave It," "Silence—No Nonsense," "We Hold What We Have."

All rumours that the shop was putting up the shutters were sternly set at rest by Churchill in his famous Mansion House speech. He had not become its senior partner to liquidate it. He won't liquidate even his salesman and junior partner, Amery, as long as he can help it. For Amery himself is a part and parcel of Churchill's Indian policy. Churchill's the injury; Amery's the insult—the insult which is often more galling than the injury and makes one forget the real wrong-doer. As Nehru said to an American correspondent: "Even if the British did not want to change their policy towards India, just keeping Amery on there as head of the India Office was a constant irritation to our people."

In view of this mutually satisfactory arrangement, one wonders why Churchill should have thrown off his mask in

the matter of excluding India from the Atlantic Charter. Why should he not have left it as usual to Amery to throw cold water on India's hopes and aspirations, especially considering that Churchill had scrupulously kept his lips sealed till then on the Indian issue? He could not have made a more disastrous debut on India than he did with his statement on September 10, 1941:

"The joint Declaration of the Atlantic Charter does not qualify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about the development of constitutional government of India, Burma or other parts of the British Empire. We have pledged by the Declaration of August 1940 to help India to obtain free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth of races subject, of course, to the fulfilment of the obligation arising from our long connection with India and our responsibilities to its many creeds, races and interests.

"At the Atlantic meeting, we had in mind primarily the extension of the sovereignty, self-government and national life of the states and nations of Europe now under Nazi yoke, and the principles which would govern any alterations in territorial boundaries of countries which may have to be made. This is quite a separate problem from the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in regions whose people owe alligiance to the British Crown. We have made declarations on the matter which are complete in themselves, free from ambiguity and related to the conditions and circumstances of the territories and peoples affected. They will be found to be entirely in harmony with the conception of freedom and justice which inspired the Joint Declaration."

Fulfilment of obligations arising from our long connection with India! Our responsibilities to its many creeds, races and interests!!! So this was what Churchill had to

offer India after two years and one week of war—the war for world freedom ! This was the reply to the moral protest and the policy of non-embarrassment of the Indian National Congress in which 25,000 people had voluntarily and non-violently gone to jail. This was the shape of things to come, which was emerging from the blood, toil, tears and sweat of humanity ! Progressive evolution of self-governing institutions !

Smelly phrases which stank in one's nostrils. Hypocritical pleas and pretexts which would not deceive even a blind puppy. On the morning of the 11th of September 1941, India woke up disillusioned and angry. A member of the Council of State called Churchill's statement a fraud on India. The President of the Servants of India Society declared that Churchill had broken his silence only to show that in his scheme of things white races alone were of any importance. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru felt that the Prime Minister had definitely worsened the position regarding India. And Mr. V. S. Srinivas Sastri, who shares with Churchill the triple distinction of being a member of the Privy Council, a holder of the Freedom of London and a Companion of Honour, was so greatly disturbed by the statement that he wanted to know if there were any means of arraigning Churchill and those for whom he was speaking before the bar of world opinion !

No, Mr. Sastri. There was no manner of means for arraigning Churchill and the British Government before the bar of world opinion for denying the Atlantic Charter to India. World opinion has no bar when the rights of subject, backward, coloured people are concerned. The whole issue of Imperialism, nevertheless, did come before the bar of world opinion with the blood-curdling swish and the ear-splitting explosions of the bombs that fell over Singapore and Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. The Pacific was no longer pacific. It was on fire.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE STONE—SIX BIRDS

WHY did Sir Stafford Cripps come to India in the spring of 1942 ? Why did he fail ?

Legion is the name of the articles and pamphlets which have been written during the last two years to answer these two questions. Sir Stafford himself and the members of his entourage ; Congress leaders and press correspondents ; participants, partisans, propagandists and professors ; Americans, Englishmen and Indians, not to talk of a few Chinese and a solitary Frenchwoman—all have vied with one another in giving his or her own version of the Cripps Mission. No other single episode in recent Indo-British history has created such international interest or has left behind such a trail of controversy and recrimination.

To my mind, the Cripps Mission really resolves itself into a Churchill Mystery. And the more pertinent questions that need to be answered are : Why did Churchill send Cripps on such a Mission, which turned out to be a fool's errand for everybody concerned—except Churchill himself ? Was there the least chance of its succeeding at all ? Why should the British Prime Minister, who in September 1941 had curtly refused to apply even the Atlantic Charter to India, suddenly profess anxiety to grant freedom to her, only six months later—as most foreign journalists were led to believe ?

Of course, there were the intervening catastrophes that followed the Japanese war,—the sinking of the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse", the loss of Malaya, Java and part of Burma, and the looming threat to India,—which suggest themselves as explanations for the seeming metamorphosis. But he is a poor judge of British character and, above all, of the personality of Winston Churchill, who

feels that the decision to send Sir Stafford Cripps to India was the result of sheer panic caused by the Japanese flood-tide of conquest. It no doubt provided the apparent, immediate excuse, but behind it lay a complex maze of motives.

By sending Cripps to India Churchill was out to kill several birds with a single stone—of which the bird India was the last and least. First and foremost in Churchill's mind must have been the indirect pressure, if not the direct prodding, from his senior partner in Washington. The British Premier's exclusion of India from the operation of the Atlantic Charter had already been adversely commented upon in the American press. But when, with the opening of the war in the Far East and the collapse of one vaunted British bastion after another, India assumed the character of a strategic base against the Japs, the United States naturally took a more intimate and keener interest in Indian affairs.

The demand that Britain should try her best to placate Indian nationalist opinion was voiced insistently both in the press and on the platform of America, if not in more influential circles in Washington. Whatever else Churchill could ignore, he could not ignore American opinion at a time when the fortunes of the Allies had reached their nadir. India was no longer merely a political or a domestic problem of Britain. It was transformed suddenly into a pressing military issue facing America as much as Britain. Whether Churchill sincerely desired to placate Indian opinion or not, he had at any rate to placate his American critics.

British spokemen are naturally at great pains to underestimate as much as possible, if not to deny altogether, what may be called the Yankee angle of the Cripps episode. Retrospectively, they consider such a suggestion to be a national affront. Sir Stafford himself made elaborate at-

tempts in the speech he delivered in the Commons after his return from India to explain away the part played during the negotiations by Col. Louis Johnson, the Personal Representative of President Roosevelt, though in New Delhi he seemed to have been perfectly agreeable to avail himself of the gallant Colonel's help.

"I wish to make it abundantly clear," he assured the Commons, "that there was no question of any American intervention but only the personal help of a very able American citizen." This attempt to bifurcate the hefty personality of Louis Johnson is no doubt interesting, but Sir Stafford overlooked the fact that his own selection for the job was made exactly because of his dual personality, as a member of the British War Cabinet and also as the self-declared friend of Indian Congress leaders.

Whatever may be its reaction upon the *amour-propre* of Tory Imperialists, Sir Stafford had personally the least excuse for considering friendly American intervention as in any way derogatory to British prestige. For, barely two years before, he had told a group of Indians in America that "the only thing we could do while in the States was to persuade a few influential Americans to bring pressure to bear upon the British Government with respect to India."[1] The manner in which Sir Stafford reacted to such pressure the moment he himself was drest in a little brief authority as a member of the British Government is extremely interesting.

Churchill's bird number two was China. In the foregoing pages we have had a frequent glimpse of Churchill's real opinion of China. Even after the war against Fascism had begun, the British Prime Minister had no compunction in cutting China's life-line—the Burma Road—in order to appease the Asiatic member of the Axis. Though the appeasement went for nought and Japan's stab in the back had

1 See Krishnalal Shridharani *My India, My America* p. 545

made China and Britain allies, the British authorities were unwilling to avail themselves of China's help in the first few months of the war, until in fact the debacle was complete and little was left to save of the British Empire in the Far East ! China, like India, then assumed a key importance in the global strategy of war. It suddenly dawned upon the Allies, first, that Japan could be finally defeated only through China, and, second, that China could be reached only through India.

The unrelieved tale of disaster compelled even the blindest Blimp in Britain to see things in this new perspective. Gone was the boast of the white man's burden, and the nine hundred million coloured people of China and India became a weight on the conscience of the Allies. As if to rub this in, Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek paid a visit to India—the first occasion in history when the head of China had come to this country—and took the unprecedented and almost breath-taking step of addressing to Britain a plea for Indian freedom while he was yet on Indian soil.

"Should freedom be denied to either China or India," he said in a valedictory broadcast from Calcutta, "there will be no real peace in the world." He proceeded more pointedly: "I sincerely hope and confidently believe that our Ally, Great Britain, without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India, will as speedily as possible give them real political power, so that they may be in position further to develop their spiritual and material strength and thus realize that their participation in the war is not merely an aid to the anti-aggression nations for securing victory, but also a turning point in their struggle for India's freedom. From an objective point of view, I am of opinion that this would be the wisest policy which will redound to the credit of the British Empire."

This intervention appears even more staggering today

than it did in those hectic days. Cripps may have subsequently denied American intervention—which he had advised himself !—but Churchill had then to make as graceful an acknowledgement as he could of the compliments paid by Chiang Kai-Shek. In fact, the very first pronouncement made by him in the House of Commons on March 11, 1942, regarding the War Cabinet's decision to send Cripps to India, contains the following significant words: "We must remember that India has a great part to play in the world struggle for freedom and that her helping hand must be extended in loyal comradeship to the valiant Chinese people, who have fought alone so long. We must remember also that India is one of the bases from which the strongest counter-blows must be struck at the advance of tyranny and aggression."

This last sentence refers, of course, to the third bird—Japan. In March 1942, Britain's ability to stem the Japanese advance had frankly become a doubtful proposition and if the Indians could be persuaded to throw their whole weight as a free, allied nation—instead of as an unwilling, subject people—in the fight, their help was naturally welcome. At any rate Churchill must have thought that the bugbear of Japanese menace and the looming threat to their land might compel the Indian leaders to accept what he was offering in his generosity—the post-dated cheque, as the *cliché* went in those days. There was a subtle attempt to play the Jap bogey for all it was worth in the official statement referred to above: "The crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made Britain wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invaders."

Bird number four was British public opinion, which had then become frankly restive and even apprehensive, particularly about the turn of affairs in the Far East. Churchill's

critics were too well aware of his diehard views on India not to make of India a pressing issue when the war approached its frontiers. Even the man in the street was becoming uncomfortably conscious of the absurdity of waging war for freeing Poland and Czechoslovakia from the Nazis and at the same time denying freedom to India, of the divergence between Allied professions and British practice. The events in the Far East had dropped the scales from his eyes, put him in a chastened mood and made him wonder whether the Allies could successfully fight a twentieth century war with nineteenth century weapons. In Sir Stafford Cripps, who had just returned from Russia and was waxing eloquent over the glory of the people's war, the common man found a worthy spokesman and the latter's inclusion in the War Cabinet was not so much the triumph of Cripps as of the common man in Britain.

Which brings us to bird number five—Sir Stafford Cripps himself! In the beginning of 1942, Cripps's prestige and influence had reached the zenith. He was hailed as the man who brought Russia on the Allied side—a claim which, by the way, will not stand a moment's scrutiny. He shone in the reflected glory of the Red Army. He was looked upon as the only man why could stand up to Churchill—had he not the courage to refuse a minor ministerial post offered by the latter? He seemed then the only possible successor to Churchill, acceptable to the British masses, though he had not the backing of any party.

Accommodating this square peg in the round hole of his Cabinet must have been something of a problem to Churchill. It was one thing to offer him a seat on the Cabinet in deference to clamant public opinion; to carry on with such a man of Calvinistic outlook from day to day was another matter. He would surely spoil the happy family atmosphere of the Churchill Cabinet. According to the well-thumbed tradi-

tions of British public life, inconvenient colleagues can always be put out of harm's way by kicking them upstairs to the House of Lords. Sir Stafford Cripps, however, was too young, too popular and too ambitious to be superannuated in this fashion.

Stalin liquidates his rivals. Roosevelt stoops to conquer them. It can be said of Churchill that he swallowed his. In the retrospect, it is evident that Cripps signed his political death-warrant when he was persuaded by Churchill to go to India. The Premier's announcement said that he volunteered to go, and a report has it that Cripps had made a solution of the Indian problem a condition precedent of his joining the Cabinet.[1] If it was so, he only played into Churchill's hand. Whatever happened, the latter could have the best of both worlds. If Cripps's standing with the Congress succeeded in pulling off the tinsel deal which Churchill had prepared for India, and in buying Indian goodwill for the prosecution of war, he would have finally solved the Indian problem *on his own terms.* It would have been the achievement of the century.

If on the other hand the Cripps Mission failed, the problem of Cripps would have been solved for the duration, *again on Churchill's own terms.* It would only remain to give Cripps a decent burial on a suitable occasion. It may only be added that while Cripps was made a member of the War Cabinet when the prestige of the Churchill Government had reached its lowest ebb in the beginning of 1942, he was reduced to the rank of an ordinary Minister the moment Allied military fortunes were retrieved with Rommel's decisive defeat and the American landing in Africa.

If the success of Cripps's meteoric rise was his alleged success in Russia, the explanation of his fall lies in the utter failure of his Indian Mission.

1 See John Gunther *Inside Asia*, latest edition.

A caveat must be entered here against a popular misconception, which has somehow passed current so long. The public belief is that Cripps was sent out by the War Cabinet in order to arrive at an amicable understanding with Indian leaders and to negotiate a final and mutually satisfactory treaty between Britain and India. Nothing is more removed from facts. Cripps was not an envoy plenipotentiary, not even a free agent authorised to arrive at a compromise and sign on behalf of his principals. He was not a missionary in the accepted sense of the word but a mere messenger of Churchill.

His mission lay merely in carrying the War Cabinet's conclusions "upon which we are agreed and which we believe represent a just and final solution." The only latitude which was allowed Cripps was to dot the "i"s and cross the"t"s of the Draft Declaration he was entrusted with—and which Churchill had already stamped as being "just and final"! And it is the considered judgment of all Indian observers that when in a fit of absent-mindedness or derring-do, Cripps deviated from his brief and began to talk of a "National Government," he was sharply pulled up by his Chief.

CHAPTER XX

JAP TODAY, JAM TOMORROW

THE popular fallacy about the Cripps "Mission" is strikingly illustrated in the famous cartoon "Trapeze Tragedy" by Shankar, in which Cripps is shown swinging with arms outstretched towards Nehru, whose hands are tied down with a heavy weight. Really speaking it was Nehru who was trying his utmost to stretch out his arms towards Cripps,

and it was Cripps whose hands were firmly tied by the deadweight of the Draft Declaration he had brought with him. Listen to Nehru: "We agreed to things which in the last twenty-two years we would never have dreamt of agreeing to or coming near.....For the first time in these twenty-two years, I swallowed many a bitter pill.....so as somehow to come to an agreement."

In fairness to Cripps, it must be noted that whatever he might have said or promised in his personal talks with Indian leaders, in his public pronouncements he made it clear that his hands were tied and that "No real, major, fundamental changes can be made in the War Cabinet's conclusions." "The scheme goes through as a whole or is rejected as a whole." He even admitted that "it has fallen to my lot to be the *messenger* of the War Cabinet in a matter of such vital and far-reaching importance to the future of the world order."

As far as the defence of India was concerned, he bluntly told everybody that it could not be transferred to Indian hands even if there was an unanimous demand for it on behalf of all the parties. The utmost that he could offer in consultation with the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief was the management of army canteens and such other things! One may incidentally note here that in spite of the complete inaptness of the above-mentioned cartoon, it is the only one from among the score of brilliant cartoons which Shankar published during the Cripps episode, which Professor Coupland has thought it fit to include in his booklet on the Cripps Mission. I am sure Shankar must be kicking himself for thus becoming the unwitting instrument of *suggestio falsi* in the hands of an Oxford don.

Why then, if "the unitedly agreed upon proposals" of the War Cabinet were so definite and precise, and if in fact they represented Britain's last and final word on India's

constitutional advance, were they not transmitted through the Viceroy, instead of subjecting Sir Stafford Cripps to such trouble and risk in carrying them over to New Delhi? Perhaps the Mission of Cripps lay precisely in putting them over to the Indian leaders with the finesse and patter of a conjurer producing rabbits out of his hat. We know those long-eared, supple, shy, rather smelly creatures too well. We know all along that they are somewhere there in the magicians's paraphernalia on the stage. Nevertheless we cannot help feeling fascinated when they are actually taken out from nowhere as it were before our very eyes. The show is the thing.

And the show was the thing with Sir Stafford Cripps. The rabbits may have belonged to Churchill. But with what exquisite showmanship did Cripps produce them out of his hat one after another—as if they were his own creation! "If I alone had drafted the document," bravely said Sir Stafford at a press conference, "it would have been in substance exactly as it is." Now this can easily be proved to be a departure from truth by comparing the Draft Document with the plea made by Sir Stafford in the speeeh he delivered in the Commons on October 26, 1939. Then he had made a categorical demand on behalf of India for a national cabinet appointed from the members of the majority of the Legislative Assembly, whose advice would be accepted by the Viceroy, "as the Crown here accepts the advice of the Cabinet when duly tendered to it." It was exactly on this rock, on the refusal of the Cripps of 1942 to grant what the Cripps of 1939 had passionately asked for, that the mission was smashed.

This leaves only the sixth and the last and the least bird to be counted for. That poor little birdie was India—the land and the people of Hindostan! What kind of *Magna Carta* was this which Churchill had entrusted to the

care of Sir Stafford Cripps? That Churchill had a lively anticipation that it would be rejected out of hand by the leaders of every party in India, is seen from the very first announcement he made on the subject in Parliament and from the devious and round-about method he devised for transmitting it to India. He had obviously more hope in Cripps's high-pressure salesmanship than in the character of the proposals in themselves!

At the same time he took great care to make them as clear-cut and cast-iron as possible so as not to leave the least scope for their being tampered with *en route* by the radical Cripps. On the face of it this is an amazing procedure to adopt to pacify 400 million people when the enemy is battering on the door. There was no room for compromise, for friendly exchange of thoughts, or for give-and-take. "We know what is good for you. Take it or leave it. And if you are foolish enough to leave it, note that there will be no further chances of political reforms for the duration." Behind the sham *Magna Carta*, behind the smooth platitudes of Cripps, lay this grim warning of Churchill.

If the British Government were really anxious to conciliate Indian opinion, they would never have adopted such dictatorial procedure, even though it was sugar-coated with the personality of a Cripps. Of the five clauses of the draft document, four dwelt on the future and only one concerned the present and that too in the broadest terms which would be capable of any interpretation. At a time when the after-war appeared more remote and imponderable than the after-life, it was absurd to expect Indians to go into ecstasies over promises regarding their future status after the Japs were defeated. What they were most interested in and anxious about was freedom here and now, as much freedom anyway as was compatible with war circumstances —freedom to fight as free men.

Cripps had neither the authority nor even the desire to offer this. On the contrary the Draft Declaration was basically only a glorified version of the "August Offer", as Professor Coupland (who had attached himself to the Cripps Mission in New Delhi) has himself stressed.[1] And in March 1942 the "August Offer" had become a joke in bad taste. In effect, Churchill's Indian charter amounted to *Jap today, Jam tomorrow!* "If you behave like good boys and fight the Japs with all your might and main, without asking any inconvenient questions as you have been doing so long, we promise you our own brand of the jam of freedom afterwards. Meanwhile tally-ho!"

British propagandists including Sir Stafford himself have laid all the blame for the failure of the Mission at the door of the Indian National Congress and, above all, on the devoted head of Mahatma Gandhi, conveniently forgetting that there was not a single party which extended its support to the scheme. But one wonders, as one recapitulates the Cripps episode at this distance of time, whether there was anybody who could have entertained the least hope of its success then—except Cripps! Was he really an innocent abroad, or did he have such an abounding faith in his own super-smartness? Gandhi thought the draft document not worth the paper on which it was written. Nehru could not swallow it try as he might. Jinnah rejected it out of hand. Savarkar would not touch it with a barge-pole. Even the I. C. S. men—the British steel frame in India—were "confidently looking forward to the failure of the Cripps Mission" according to a British war correspondent who happened to be in New Delhi then.[2]

And supposing the miracle had come to pass and Cripps had succeeded, what could have happened? Nothing

1 *The Cripps Mission* p. 30
2 See Alan Moorehead *A Year of Battle* p. 110

serious enough to shake Churchill's equanimity. Neither the Ganges would have been set on fire nor would the Himalayas have begun to melt. Everything would have been as smiling as ever in the Garden of Eden. The "great estates beyond the sea" would have continued to bring their annual revenues, even if they had been glorified as an "Indian Union" comprising of one or several Federations. And lest any irate reader should accuse me of losing all sense of proportion, let me quote here the comment of a leading British Weekly in this context. It is *The New Statesman and Nation* writing long after the passions aroused by the Cripps Mission had died down:

"As for India, Churchill has always regarded it as an enormous Blenheim Park entailed to him and his class for ever. The only puzzle is to account for his consent to the Cripps Mission, and his subsequent statement (as gruff and curt as possible) that the offer still held good. He publicly sanctioned the original offer three days after the fall of Rangoon. We do not suggest that even then his own confidence in victory flagged, but he may have found it more difficult than usual to impart it to his colleagues and allies. The perfunctory renewal was made in a speech which carried the tactics of *Divide et Impera* to the verge of caricature.

"With less than this degree of encouragement, Mr. Churchill may have reckoned, the Princes and Mr. Jinnah between them may be trusted to render the process of self-determination unworkable. Shorn of its Muslim provinces, an amputated Hindustan, sore and angry, could still survive. But if the Princes, taking their cue from Mr. Churchill, should decide to stay outside the future Indian Union, it might just be capable of life, but certainly not of independence. For their States, often in dislocated fragments, are scattered round all the provinces and even inside them. They cut the railways, interrupt the electric grid, and sprawl across the

trunk roads. If Mr. Churchill glanced at the map before he sanctioned the Cripps offer, he may have realised that the risk he took was negligible."[1]

Churchill's triumph was complete. With a single stone he had brought down all the six birds which lay still and lifeless at his feet, to be plucked at his pleasure or cast away in disdain. First and foremost, America was reassured. The White House could no longer find fault with Whitehall's handling of the Indian problem. American opinion instead of being annoyed with Britain had become angry with India. As Leland Stowe, the American author, says in his book *They Shall Not Sleep*:

"Reading those American comments in New Delhi, the sum total effect was that they formed one loud, impatient lecture. It was said 'You have been offered Dominion Status and Independence. Why don't you take it? Don't you realise that we Allies are at war and have not got the time to discuss the details of the question? Why should you insist on a large share of responsibility for the defence of your own country? What is this all arguing about the question? The Japanese may hit you any moment. Don't you understand that there is no time to waste for discussing mere details of ways and means?'

"This is what the American reaction sounded like, petulant and childish. The Indians had not even the opportunity of replying to the strangely undemocratic sermons given by our safe, secure editorial gods."

It was Churchill's biggest success—the success of the big guns of propaganda over the still, small voice of truth—for war censorship had gagged India's mouth. Fortunately, Stowe himself supplies the retort which India would have given to America, had she been free to speak out her mind:

1 December 12, 1942

"You Americans say that there is no time for discussion ! But these details will determine whether in actuality we would ever get freedom of self-government. You say that there is not time—but whose fault is that ? Did not we pose this question frankly in the first weeks of the war in 1939 ? You Americans say that we are endangering the democratic cause. Is it we who endanger it ? Or is it those who waited so long before offering the use of even a portion of democratic self-government ? Our lives and our children's lives are involved and yet the voices of America's free press are chiding us for being unreasonable. Were your Washington, Jefferson and the signatories of the Declaration of Independence willing to wait until England's European war was settled ? What happened to the Americans then ? We thought you believed in true democracy. We thought you were our friends."

Secondly, the Chinese people felt bewildered and hurt at the turn of events. The failure of the Cripps Mission and the subsequent mass arrest of Congressmen must have come like a slap in the face of Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek. Since then our great neighbours and friends have taken resort in a dignified silence. "Talk not of the evil you cannot remedy," says an ancient proverb.

Thirdly, the conscience of the British people was set at rest. And, ironically enough, it was left to a biographer of Cripps to put this down on the credit side of his Mission. I wonder if Patricia Strauss was conscious of the inherent irony in her remarks when she wrote :

"The millions in Britain who from experience do not trust Conservative promises any more than do the Indians, felt satisfied for the first time that a genuine, and indeed generous attempt had been made to meet the aspirations of the Indian people. The sense of guilt felt by the great majority of the British people over the treatment of India

was removed. Until the failure of the Cripps Mission, they had been sceptical about the communal differences in India, suspecting that they were exaggerated by the Conservatives as an excuse for their do-nothing policy. Now they realised that the racial and religious difficulties were real. They saw that the first step towards a solution of the problem must be agreement among the Indians themselves."[1]

Fourthly, we have already seen what happened to Sir Stafford Cripps. But even worse than his political decline in Britain was the moral discredit he brought upon himself in India—not so much by his failure, as by his subsequent conduct, when he began to mouth all the diehard phrases which he had spent a life-time in condemning. The measure of Cripps's ignominy in Indian eyes was full when even his friend and admirer Nehru dubbed him "The Devil's Advocate." There is indeed more point in that description *than even Nehru himself seems to have realised then!*

CHAPTER XXI

HIS FINEST HOUR

WHATEVER view one may take of the Cripps Mission—whether we call it a political failure of Cripps or a strategic success of Churchill,—it cannot be denied that it had a decisive psychological effect upon the British Government.

The Whitehall view was that it had done its level best to solve the Indian deadlock and that it had established its *bona fides* in the eyes of the world. It could now proceed with a clean conscience and a firm hand to deal with the aftermath of the Cripps Mission. No doubt it would still

1 *Cripps—Advocate and Rebel* p. 181

be necessary to convince the world that the responsibility of its breakdown—and also of the showdown which gradually began to loom large on the horizon—rested entirely with the Congress leaders and specially Gandhi. But that would be an easy thing when all the channels of propaganda were controlled by Government and the voice of India could not reach the outside world—cannot often be heard even in India ! There has never been any pretence that censorship in this country has anything to do with the war as such. Its character is frankly political, not military.

Churchill on his part must have recalled all the warnings he had given in the previous decade against the policy of "appeasement" in India, which he himself was compelled to follow for the time being under the stress of war in the East. "It is never possible," he had said in 1931, "to make concessions to Orientals when they think you are weak or are afraid of them. It they once think they have got you at a disadvantage, all their moods become violent, concessions are treated as valueless, and necessary acts of civil repression often add fuel to the flames." [1] "The truth is that Gandhiism and all it stands for will, sooner or later, have to be grappled with and finally crushed. It is no use trying to satisfy a tiger by feeding him with cat's-meat" [2]—of the Cripps Mission ! Now that the Indians had rejected what was given, "What you cannot give, refuse and use your power, which is ample, to sustain your decision !" [3]

The international situation after the middle of 1942 was also not so catastrophic as it seemed four months before. The tide of Japanese conquest had exhausted itself and the monsoon had brought about a cessation of fighting. The Japs would be too busy for a long time in consolidating their hold over Malaya and Burma to be an imminent menace to

1 *India* pp. 75-6 2 *Ibid* pp. 46-7

3 *Minutes of evidence: Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms* p. 1807

India. The Germans on their part were locked in a mortal combat with Russia, who had proved during the foregoing twelve months her capacity to resist and stall the Nazi drive to the East. India was no longer in danger of being the meeting-ground of the Japs and the Germans. India could be dealt with again as an internal, domestic problem isolated from the current of international events.

We have seen that Cripps himself took the lead in his speeches in the Commons and his pronouncements addressed to America—his anxiety to absolve himself in American eyes is amusing!—in foisting all the blame for his failure on Gandhi. And when soon after his departure from India, the latter began to talk of the complete and irrevocable withdrawal of Britain from India as the only solution of the Indian problem, it was easy to paint the Mahatma as a potential Petain. It was easy to pick up passages from his numerous writings in the *Harijan* and to distort them so as to convey the impression that he was out to placate Japan regardless of all consequences to the Allied cause. Had he not in his great-hearted simplicity expressed a desire to fly to Tokyo to plead with Tojo? Was he not asking the British to quit India? Was he not protesting even against the presence of American troops on Indian soil?

It is only a short step from being a defeatist to becoming a Fifth Columnist, and no accusation was more damning in 1942 than to say of a person or an institution that he or it was Fifth Columnist! It is always a good policy to give a dog a bad name before hanging it. And as Gandhi began to develop and propagate the "Quit India" demand—and in that process to amend and revise it, so as not to prejudice the Allied cause in the least—the Big Berthas of British propaganda and the pea-shooters of Anglo-India swung into action against the Mahatma and the Indian National Congress.

It was suggested that men like Nehru and Azad were

helpless against Gandhi and that the latter was spreading his defeatist virus in the Congress rank and file and transforming it into the biggest Fifth Column organisation in the world. The Congress, which was anti-Fascist from the very birth of Fascism, had become pro-Fascist overnight because the Jap stood on India's frontier! The Congress, which wanted to arm the entire country so as to resist the enemy, was being accused of aiding and abetting his invasion!

This is not the place to discuss the Quit India resolution passed by the All-India Congress Committee on August 8, 1942, or the disturbances which followed *after* the arrest of Gandhi and the Congress leaders, but *before* the movement was launched. Suffice it to say that those disturbances were of an unparalleled magnitude in the modern history of India and that they shook this country from end to end as by an earthquake.

The following figures taken from official sources for the period ending December 31, 1942, tell their own tale: Persons arrested—60,229. Persons detained under Defence Rules without trial—18,000. Persons killed by police or military firing—940. Persons injured due to police or military firing—1630. It was also officially revealed that during the same period the military had to be called out in about 60 places, that the police had to resort to firing on about 538 occasions and that planes were used in five places to disperse the crowds by machine-gunning from the air!

What concerns us here is neither the "Quit India" demand of Gandhi nor its sanguinary consequences, but the reactions they had upon Churchill's mind. Once the die was cast, it was natural that Churchill should have heartily welcomed the showdown. It presented him with a timely opportunity of putting into practice what he had preached for the previous thirteen years, of solving the Indian problem once for all by crushing Gandhi-ism and all it stood for.

Indeed, it was extremely fortunate that it was given to himself to cross swords with Gandhi—if such a thing could be possible with the non-violent Mahatma! All the fighting spirit of the Marlboroughs must have been roused in him. Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo—and Gandhi! Come one, come all. Forsooth, as far as India was concerned, it was Churchill's finest hour.

One can understand all this. Not only that but one can even put oneself under Churchill's skin and sympathise with him. After all, what else could one do with the half-naked fakir and his half-baked followers, except put them out of harm's way? From the earliest dawn of history authority has been faced with the same problem whenever rebels raised their heads against law, order and the powers that be. Of course, the methods of disposing them have varied all the way from the Cross to the Concentration Camp. In keeping with its civilized traditions, the British Government merely "interned Gandhi and other principal leaders under conditions of the highest comfort and consideration." How it dealt with the rank and file is another matter.

But all this was to be expected—the volcanic outburst of mass violence as also the organised "leonine violence" of a Government which was faced with a threat to its very existence. The underlings and myrmidions of Government always exhibit themselves in their worst colours in crises like this. But what was neither expected then nor can be understood even now, after the lapse of so much time, is the review of the Indian situation which Churchill gave in the House of Commons on September 10, 1942, which turned out to be the first comprehensive statement he made on India since becoming the Prime Minister.

It was a revealing performance. It conclusively proved that India and particularly the Indian National Congress remained as much a blind-spot of Churchill as ever, *pace*

Vincent Sheean. As Prime Minister, Churchill gave expression to all his violent prejudices and cheap jibes as he was wont to do during the thirties, as a freelance member of the Commons. He had learnt nothing and unlearnt nothing. Listen to this "basic data" with which he regaled the House: "The Indian Congress Party does not represent all India. It does not represent the majority of the people of India. It does not even represent the Hindu masses. It is a political organisation built around a party machine and sustained by certain manufacturing and financial interests.

"Outside that party and fundamentally opposed to it are 90 million Muslims in British India, who have their rights of self-expression, 50 million depressed classes or untouchables, as they are called, because they are supposed to defile their Hindu co-religionists by their presence or their shadow, and 95 million subjects of the Princes of India with whom we are bound by treaty. In all, there are 235 millions in these large groupings alone out of the 390 millions in all India. This takes no account of the large elements among the Hindus, the Sikhs and Christians in British India who deplore the present policy of the Congress Party. It is necessary that these main facts should not be overlooked here or abroad, because no appreciation of the Indian problem or of the relations between India and Britain is possible without recognition of these basic data."

This Churchillian arithmetic is not likely to surprise the reader of this book and I shall therefore only quote here the following comment made by the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore, which is the most rightist among the British-owned papers in India: "It is merely fatuous casuistry to seek to lower the prestige of the Congress by subtracting from India's myriads the millions, who do not owe allegiance to this organisation, and displaying the re-

maining few as the possible Congress adherents. To the 90 million Muslims, the 50 million untouchables and the 95 million state subjects whom he counted as non-Congressmen, Mr. Churchill might have added 200 million who are politically unawakened, and thus have had the satisfaction of proving that the Congress has a following of minus 45 million—and the utter futility of his own outlook on India!" It is on the basis of this fatuous casuistry that Churchill has been governing India during four most momentous years of history!

Churchill then described how criminal the Congress had become: "The Congress Party has now abandoned the policy in many respects of non-violence and has come into the open as a revolutionary movement, designed to paralyse communications and generally to promote disorder, looting of shops and sporadic attacks upon the Indian police accompanied from time to time by revolting atrocities—the whole having intention, or at any rate effect, of hampering the defence of India against the Japanese invader.

"It may well be that these activities have been aided by Japanese Fifth Column work on a widely extended scale and with a special direction to strategic points. It is noteworthy, for instance, that communications of the Indian forces defending Bengal on the Assam frontier have been specially attacked. In these circumstances the Viceroy and the Government of India with the unanimous support of the Viceroy's Council, the great majority of which are Indians —patriotic and wise men—have felt it necessary to proclaim and suppress the central and provincial organs of this association, which has become committed to hostile and criminal courses."

After having demonstrated to his own satisfaction and presumably to that of his audience, in view of the cheers with which his speech was punctuated, how (1) insigni-

ficant, (2) non-representative and (3) criminal the Congress was, Churchill proceeded to dwell upon its "powerlessness to throw into confusion the normal peaceful life of India": "So far as matters have gone up to the present, they have revealed the impotence of the Congress Party either to subdue or even to sway the Indian army, to draw from their duty the enormous body of Indian officials or, still less, to stir the vast Indian masses.

"India is a continent almost as large and actually more populous than Europe and divided by racial, and above all, religious differences far deeper than any that have separated the Europeans. All public services are working. In five provinces, Ministers responsible to their Legislature stand at their post.....The Congress conspiracy against communications is breaking down. Acts of pillage and arson are being repressed and being punished with an incredibly small loss of life. Less than 500 persons have been killed....."

Incredibly small loss of life! Less than 500 persons have been killed! Don't rub your eyes. Yes, it was the Prime Minister of Britain and one of the chief leaders of the war for freedom and democracy, who uttered these words on September 10, 1942, in the Mother of Parliaments. Those killed persons were not Germans or Italians or Japs but Indians, citizens of the British Empire, normally peaceful civilians, who were misled and inflamed into doing violent acts—or, as was more often the case, merely into joining unlawful assemblies—by the passions of the moment, and in the absence of their leaders, who were suddenly put behind prison bars.

In law they might have been criminals and rebels deserving the extreme penalty. But a person of the standing and in the position of Churchill should have looked beneath the surface, into the background of those tragic events and bewailed the loss of every single life as an incre-

dible blunder of statesmanship. As the *Manchester Guardian* wrote while commenting on the speech: "The stern measures which have evidently been successful are not a part of a policy, but arose from the failure of a policy." Five hundred persons killed within one month! This is exactly four times the casualties in killed suffered per month on an average by the Indian Army during the first four years of the war against the Axis.[1] Comparisons may be odious but sometimes they are unavoidable. Incredibly small loss of life, indeed!

The Prime Minister began his statement with the assurance that "the course of events in India has been improving and is on the whole reassuring." He also ended it on the same note: "I, therefore, feel entitled to report to the House that the situation in India at this moment gives no cause for undue despondency or alarm." But just before this concluding remark he observed, as if to reinsure his reassurance: "I may add that large reinforcements have reached India and that the number of white soldiers now in that country, although very small compared with its size and population, are larger than at any time in the British connection." So it all boiled down to this!

In an atavistic throwback, Prime Minister Churchill suddenly drew the sword which Lieutenant Churchill had sheathed long ago. Churchill had always taken pride in the fact that the British troops in India had never to be employed in the quelling of disturbances.[2] When they had been so used at Amritsar in 1919, he had unhesitatingly condemned the incident as being "not the British way of doing business."

1 The total casualties in killed amount to 5,912 in four years, as announced by Churchill on April 4, 1944, in the Commons.

2 See *India* pp. 43, 78, 122, also *Minutes of Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform* p. 1807

"There is no need for foolish panic, or talk of its being necessary to produce a situation like that at Jallianwallah Bagh in order to save India. On the contrary, as we contemplate the great physical forces and the power at the disposal of the British Government in their relations with the native population of India, we ought to remember—as a warning—the words of Macaulay on an earlier period: *And then was seen what we believe to be the most frightful of all spectacles, the strength of civilization without its mercy.*"[1]

On September 10, 1942, Churchill had forgotten Macaulay's warning as also his own oft-expressed revulsion of the use of the army in civil affairs. Now he showed as if the army was the only sanction behind British rule in India, the ultimate guarantee of its continuation, the naked proof that the situation would be kept under control. Not consent, let alone the co-operation of the governed, but the "number of white soldiers now in that country—larger than at any time in the British connection," was what mattered really. Churchill even forgot that those large reinforcements of white soldiers had reached India not to hold down that country for Britain in the name of law and order, but to fight the Japs for the sake of liberty and democracy!

But why *white?* Was it only a slip of the tongue or did Churchill perchance include the number of white American soldiers, who were then present in India, too, in his computation? A critical reader of Churchill will find that he has always used the words "British troops" or "British soldiers" when he meant them as such. This was the first occasion when he revealingly used the words "white troops". And sure enough, this was the very first occasion in history when American troops were present in India. At any rate, Roosevelt did not fail to notice the sini-

1 *India* p. 26

ster implication of this remark and he promptly made it clear: "Nobody in India or anywhere else in Asia will misunderstand the presence of American armed forces if they will believe, as we do, that their job is to assure the defeat of Japan, without which there can be no opportunity for any of us to enjoy and expand the freedoms for which we fight."

And so, since September 1942, the Indian situation has been well in hand—in British hand! As Lin Yutang wrote: "The handling of the problem of India is merely a symptom of the failure to recognise the issue of Freedom versus Empire, of general spiritual unpreparedness and the belief that resentment, fear and hatred do not matter so long as "the situation is well in hand." Which simply means that rioters can be quelled by riot squads and which is exactly Hitler's way of thinking. We may be quite sure that after the war, the situation will be even better in hand, while the reasons for denying India freedom will remain just as valid."

Though he has scrupulously avoided referring to it, Churchill will nevertheless have to admit that the situation went slightly out of hand in the latter half of 1943, when an unprecedented famine in Bengal gathered about two million people to their forefathers, drove countless more to utter destitution, sent innumerable women to brothels and sapped the very life-force of the province for generations to come. The famine of 1943 has thrown into shade even its terrible predecessor of 1770, about which Macaulay wrote in such flesh-creeping phrases in his essay on Robert Clive. Churchill must surely be remembering the latter, even if he has had no time to attend to the former due to his numerous preoccupations.

The ghastly reality of the 1943 Bengal famine is still a raw and gaping wound on the body politic of India. It has forever belied the myth of a benevolent, omnipotent

bureaucracy, a myth in which Churchill has always reposed a blind belief. The utter incompetence of the bureaucracy now reeks to high heaven. "The apparatus of Government in India," wrote Churchill in his Memorandum to the Joint Select Committee, "is incomparably more important to the masses than political change. Peace, justice, hygiene and scientific development form the sole foundation whereby not only the well-being and progress, but even the very existence of scores of million of Indians depends."

That apparatus stands discredited for all time now. It can maintain law and order with the policeman's *lathi* and occasionally the soldier's rifile, or even the airman's machine-gun, but it cannot provide a handful of rice for the dying. There has been a major governmental failure in this country over an elementary responsibility and it is not merely disingenuous but heartless of the British Government to deny responsibility for it, as Amery has done. Even when the streets of the first city of India and the second city of the Empire were littered with corpses, censorship prevented all references to the famine from reaching the foreign press. But when at last the groans of the dying did reach the world, the stark horror of it all provoked caustic comments from far and near.

Senator James M. Mead of New York who visited India in 1943, was shocked that at the time when thousands of shivering people lay on the sidewalks of Calcutta, the authorities were still devoting precious space in freight cars to race horses *en route* for the Calcutta Gold Cup! India made him angrier than anything else he saw during his 45,000-mile trip. *The New Statesman And Nation* declared that "it is impossible to read the story of the famine without the sense that this tragedy has passed judgment on our rule in India." And though Churchill was in no way directly responsible for it, it passed a judgment on him, too, morally speaking.

For he is not merely at the head of that rule, but has always been its most vigorous champion. He has arrogated on behalf of the British Parliament the responsibility for the welfare of India's teeming millions. He has backed the bureaucracy as their saviour from the selfish intelligentsia and scheming politicians of India. He has placed material welfare of the masses before their political progress. He has maintained that good government was better than self-government as far as India was concerned. He has always stood by the doctrine of Britain's trusteeship over India.

Indeed, it can even be said that Churchill's responsibility for the holocaust of the famine is more than moral. He is responsible not merely because he happened to be the head of a Government, which could not prevent its citizens dying like flies. He is responsible before the bar of history in a more direct and personal manner.

Years ago, he had used the terribly low standard of living in India as an argument against the grant of self-government. During the debate on the Government of India Act, he had summoned the hundred million souls, whom *Pax Britannica* had called into being, as his witnesses against the reforms. Alone among British and even Indian statesmen, he showed the prophetic insight to anticipate the 1943 famine as long ago as 1935, as the following extracts from his speech show:

"India is a country, almost a continent, which responded to the influence of British peace, order and justice, and all the applications of modern science, only by an increase of population. There has been a tremendous increase of population there. New wealth, new food, new facilities for locomotion, new hygiene, new canals, improvements in forestry and agriculture have not made the Indian masses better off. They have only brought into being in the last fifty years 100,000,000 more souls in India. A

gigantic population has remained, on the whole, at a very low level of human subsistence, but has become much more numerous.

"Such a vast helpless mass requires extra British guidance, higher efficiency of Government, more British civil servants and a stricter and more vigorous administration in all technical matters. All you offer them are liberal formulas, administrative relaxation and decline. The huge machine of Indian Government is to be allowed to slow down, just at the time when the inhabitants of India have multiplied far beyond the limits of their basic food supply, just at the time when they require, above all things, a far higher measure of disinterested and enlightend autocracy.

"Just at that time you offer this bouquet of faded flowers of Victorian Liberalism, which, however admirable in themselves, have nothing to do with Asia, and are being universally derided and discarded throughout the continent of Europe. For this bouquet they have to pay a heavy price. Money raised by taxes in India, which like the salt tax, draw exactions from the poorest of the poor, from people whose poverty is inconceivable even to the poorest of the poor in this country,—this money is needed and its exaction is only justified if it is used for hospitals, for plague prevention, for technical education, for improved irrigation and other modern apparatus.

"Only in this way can a population which is one-sixth of the human race be kept at its present artificial level of numbers. *In the standard of life they have nothing to spare. The slightest fall from the present standard of life in India means slow starvation, and the actual squeezing out of life, not only of millions but of scores of millions of people, who have come into the world at your invitation and under the shield and protection of British power.*"[1]

1 *Hansard* Vol. 302, cols. 1920–21

Churchill thus stands convicted out of his own mouth for his Government's failure to prevent the death of hundreds of thousands of Indians, who had come into the world at Britain's invitation and under the shield and protection of British power. *He* cannot say that he was not forewarned !

CHAPTER XXII

GANDHI AND CHURCHILL

Carthage must be destroyed !

—CATO

(Second Century B. C.)

Gandhi-ism must be crushed !

—CHURCHILL

(Twentieth Century A. D.)

IN Churchill's famous portrait-gallery of *Great Contemporaries*, there is one portrait missing. Kings and commoners, soldiers and dictators, savants and statesmen—all rub shoulders in the pages of his book. All receive his critical appraisal for their individual achievements and also as the representatives of the age in which they lived. None he judges too harshly ; even for Hitler he has a word—in fact several words—of tribute.

But there is no room in this gallery for one of his greatest contemporaries, for one who will go down in history as one of the noblest figures of all times. Perhaps this is not to be wondered at considering that Mahatma Gandhi is no more the representative of his age than Jesus Christ was of his. On the contrary, he is the challenge to the age in which he is born—to its materialism and its greed, its indus-

trial civilization and its power politics, its exploitation and its wars. The Mahatma is one of the most complicated figures of history. He is a politician as well as a saint, a doer as well as a dreamer, a fighter as well as a philosopher. His own spirit exalted above human wants and weaknesses, he can yet visualise God Almighty in a bowl of rice. " Before the hungry, " Gandhi wrote in 1921, " even God dare not appear except in the shape of bread. " He is a cross between St. Francis of Assisi and George Washington thrown against the background of the twentieth century.

Above all, Gandhi is the biggest challenge to the British Empire—the Empire which Churchill has vowed to hold, the Empire which he will not liquidate as long as he remains the first minister of the King. Gandhi is thus a challenge to Churchill—ideologically a bigger challenge than Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo combined ever were. It is conceivable that under certain circumstances British Imperialism could have come to an understanding with the Fascist powers, as in fact it tried its Munich best to do under the guidance of Chamberlain and the Cliveden Set. It is notorious that Hitler always professed himself to be a good friend of the British Empire and was anxious to guarantee its integrity, if only Britain allowed him a free hand in Europe. He has put it on permanent record in his *Mein Kampf*: "I as a German greatly prefer to see India under British Government than under any other."

Churchill may have had this reassurance in his mind when he wrote his famous essay on Hitler in 1935 : "The story of Hitler's struggle cannot be read without admiration for the courage, the perseverance, and the vital force which enabled him to challenge, defy, conciliate, or overcome, all the authorities or resistance which barred his path..... Those who have met Herr Hitler face to face in public business or on social terms have found a highly compe-

tent, cool, well-informed functionary with an agreeable manner, a disarming smile, and few have been unaffected by a subtle personal magnetism."[1] Better known than this appreciation of Hitler is Churchill's panegyric of Mussolini:

"I could not help being charmed like so many other people have been, by Signor Mussolini's gentle and simple bearing and by his calm, detached poise in spite of so many burdens and dangers. Secondly, anyone could see that he thought of nothing but the lasting good, as he understood it, of the Italian people and that no lesser interest was of the slightest consequence to him." In fairness to Churchill, I must add here that he has lately lost this admiration for the Fuerher and the ex-Duce. Now Hitler in his eyes is "a monster of wickedness" and a "bloodthirsty guttersnipe," while Mussolini is the former's lackey and jackal, "the crafty, cold-blooded, black-hearted Italian who sought to gain an empire on the cheap."

The whirligig of time brings on strange revenge !

Regarding Gandhi, however, Churchill never had any delusions. Instinctively he had realised long ago that it were not the Fascist dictators reeking with pride and power, but the frail figure of Gandhi with his terrible humility who constituted the real challenge to the British Empire, to all what that Empire stood for, to Churchill himself.

After all, there was much in common between the dictators and Churchill, between Fascism and Imperialism, while Gandhi lived in a world apart. The former demanded only *lebensraum*, a place in the sun, while the latter desired, in effect, that the British should shut up themselves in their little island, that the sun should finally set over the British Empire. Churchill could give a reply in kind, and with compound interest, to "the rifles, the cannon, the tanks, the poison-gas cylinders, the aeroplanes, the sub-

1 *Great Contemporaries* pp. 227 and 230 (Reprint Society Edition.)

marines and the fleet,"[1] which were flowing from the arsenals and factories of Hitler and Mussolini.

But he had no answer to Gandhi's ridiculous philosophy of *Satyagraha*, of turning the left cheek to him who had struck the right, of trying to conquer one's enemies by love, of standing four-square and on all occasions for truth. What is truth?—asked Jesting Pilate long ago. Surely, thinks Winston Churchill, it can't be translated in terms of the liquidation of the British Empire!

Years before Britain had stopped her appeasement of Hitler, long before Churchill had lost his admiration for Mussolini, as long ago as 1931, he had realised that "Gandhi has become the symbol and the almost god-like champion of all those forces which are now working for our extrusion from India."[2] Even then he would not have any truck with that "malignant subversive fanatic." During the course of the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations he thundered: "I am against this surrender to Gandhi. I am against these conversations and agreements between Lord Irwin and Mr. Gandhi. Gandhi stands for the expulsion of Britain from India. Gandhi stands for the permanent exclusion of British trade from India.....You will never be able to come to terms with Gandhi."[3] Churchill was not content only with making the diagnosis. With prophetic prescience he also prescribed the remedy—the remedy which he was to apply with his own hands eleven years later, when Gandhi did at last deliver the ultimatum to Britain to quit India: "The truth is that Gandhi-ism and all it stands for will have to be grappled with and finally crushed."

And this has been the burden of Churchill's song on India, the unrelenting refrain which has marked all his utterances since 1930. *Gandhi-ism must be crushed!* Twenty-one hundred years ago Marcus Porcius Cato was

1 *Ibid* p. 231 2 *India* p. 106 3 *Ibid.* p. 120

one of the deputies sent to arbitrate between Carthage and Numidia. During his visit he was so struck by Carthagian prosperity that he was convinced that the security of Rome depended on the annihilation of Carthage. From that time, history records, in season and out of season, he kept repeating the cry *Delenda est Carthago*—Carthage must be destroyed !—Carthage must be crushed ! That is the only parallel one can find to Churchill's war-cry.

Cato and Churchill. The former lived in the second century before Christ and the latter belongs to the twentieth century after Christ. Yet how much is common between them ! Both are great figures, sterling patriots, with a record of matchless service to their countries. Cato typified the Roman character as Churchill does the British. Cato was the champion of the Roman Empire as Churchill is of the British. Almost the last public act of the former was to urge his countrymen to the Third Punic War. The latter is actually at the head of his countrymen in fighting the Second World War. Cato did not live to see Carthage destroyed, while Churchill has the supreme satisfaction of executing his dire sentence upon Gandhi-ism with his own hands.

Cato, nevertheless, had at least visited Carthage and seen its power and splendour, had satisfied himself with personal observation that its military might did constitute a threat to Rome. Churchill, on the other hand, has never met Gandhi face to face, though the latter's visit to England during the Second Round Table Conference had given him an opportunity to do so. There are various versions current about the Churchill-Gandhi meeting which did *not* take place then. Glorney Bolton in his *The Tragedy of Gandhi* writes in connection with this:

"Apart from heart-to-heart talks with British delegates, Mr. Gandhi sought heart-to-heart talks with the men whom he judged to be his most powerful adversaries—Mr. Winston

Churchill, Lord Rothermere and Lord Beaverbrook. They had not attempted to meet him, though he was sure that if only he could talk with them alone, they would understand his point of view. One day, as he was about to leave the Palace, a visiting card was brought to him. It was from Mr. Randolph Churchill. Mr. Gandhi almost ran to greet him, and he bore as gently as he could the discovery that Mr. Randolph Churchill had come, not as his father's emissary, but on a journalistic errand."[1]

Another version was given by the *Bombay Chronicle* in its leading article of January 26, 1944:

"It may not be known to many that Gandhiji on his part at least, had made a serious voluntary effort to meet Mr. Churchill—but strange and sad to say, the latter deliberately spurned the opportunity of meeting the latter because, presumably, he felt it below his dignity to shake hands and converse with the "naked fakir" of India, though the King of Great Britain himself had felt no hesitation in inviting the latter to the Buckingham Palace. The story goes that when Gandhiji was in London as an invited delegate to the Second Round Table Conference in 1930, he being anxious to meet the illustrious Tory leader, proceeded to the latter's residence and sent in his visiting card.

"As a result, Mr. Randolph Churchill, the son of Mr. Winston Churchill, is reported to have presented himself before Gandhiji and asked the latter what he wanted with his father. Gandhiji is understood to have stated in reply that he had no particular business to talk about with Mr. Churchill, but that he had felt that it would be a happy thing for him if he could meet the great British leader personally, just as he had met several others. To the astonishment of Gandhiji, he is reported to have been told by Mr. Randolph Churchill that his father was too busy and could not see him!"

1. p. 262

As it is not at present possible to verify the alleged incident from Mahatma Gandhi himself,[1] I sought a clarification from Mr. Devadas Gandhi, his youngest son and the distinguished editor of *The Hindustan Times* of Delhi, who had accompanied his father to London and can thus speak with authority. He has kindly allowed me to quote his reply here:

"Both the versions are wrong. The second version is an absolute fabrication. Randolph saw Gandhiji along with other journalists, and Gandhiji knew from the beginning that he came as a journalist. During the talk with him, however, Gandhiji did ask Randolph to convey his regards to Mr. Churchill and also to say that he hoped that they would meet before he left London. But no occasion for a meeting between Gandhiji and Churchill arose and that I think was due to the fact that Mr. Churchill wanted to avoid meeting Gandhiji. I believe that Mr. Churchill did privately say that he did not care to meet Gandhiji."

That is of course perfectly understandable in view of Churchill's temperament. He is a person of strong likes and dislikes. He can hate as heartily as he can love. He can be as coldly pitiless as warmly generous. In a moment of illumination, as on the eve of the collapse of France, or on the morrow of Hitler's invasion of Russia, he can transcend all the limitations of his class

1. This chapter was obviously written before the release of Mahatma Gandhi. Subsequently I sent the ms. to Mr. Pyarelal, his Secretary, for further elucidation. I quote his reply, which can be taken to be the last word on the episode:

"Gandhiji has gone through the chapter entitled "Gandhi and Churchill" of your projected book. Shri Devadas's version of the meeting between Gandhiji and Churchill, which never came off, is substantially correct. Gandhiji has no independent recollection of his own. I was present at that interview between Randolph and Gandhiji, and my recollection of it, which is fairly vivid, is identical with Shri Devadas's so far as that version goes."

and constitution, discard without a qualm the prejudices, professions and passions of a life time. But he can also shut his eyes against light, stick even to demonstrably perverse opinions with the tenacity of an ichneumon.

Harold Laski once wrote: "Where Churchill is interested, he can still learn; but unless he is interested, his tendency is to be unsympathetic to a point of view he has not learned to share. So that where he is blind, as over India, or basically uninterested, as in the problems of industrial organisation, he finds it difficult to reorientate his mind to a world wholly different from what it was when he was forming his basic outlook."

How utterly blind Churchill is on India can be realised from Vincent Sheean's testimony (already referred to) regarding Churchill's refusal in 1935 to speak to his old colleagues and friends, if they had been in favour of even the least and most modest constitutional reform in India. If Churchill could behave so with his own colleagues and friends, one can pretty well guess what feelings he must have been entertaining about Gandhi, whom he considers the *fons et origo* of all the mischief in India for the last twenty-five years.

The spectacle of this "malignant subversive fanatic" striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace not only alarmed but "nauseated" him, by his own confession. It was almost a physical loathing which Churchill had developed for Gandhi. No wonder he did not care to see Gandhi, even though the latter was extremely anxious on his part to meet his adversary face to face. For Gandhi has put the Biblical injunction to love one's enemy into practice as few men have done since Christ. He thinks nothing of abasing himself before those who decry or despise him. He is so intrinsically good and just himself that he is always confident of evoking a similar response even from

his foes, though he may fail to find a common approach.

Lionel Fielden, who came to India as Controller of Broadcasting (an office analogous to that of the Governor of the B. B. C.) and ran back to Britain before he could become an encrusted bureaucrat, observed after interviewing Gandhi a few times—a thing strictly *verboten* in official circles in India :

"I doubt whether anyone, unless he has the hide of a hippopotamus and the mind of a fossilized Blimp, could fail to perceive the goodness of the man, a goodness, may be as irritating to politicians as Christ's was to Pilate, but nevertheless goodness."[1] "The bother about Gandhi as far as Englishmen are concerned," further remarks Fielden, "is that he makes you feel small, or to put it a little differently, he makes you feel that your soul, or your motives if you like, may be rather mean and paltry."[2]

Does such a subconscious thought lurk beneath Churchill's apparent loathing of Gandhi ? Did he avoid seeing him not because he did not care but because he felt slightly uncomfortable, if not afraid, to do so ?—one wonders. For Churchill is neither a hippopotamus nor a fossilized Blimp, even though to the world's gaze he presents such an exterior on the Indian issue. The dominant impression left by him upon the keenly sensitive mind of Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek, after their very first meeting in Cairo in November, 1943, was that the British Prime Minister was a deeply emotional man.

What Chiang did not probably guess was that Churchill is also a deeply religious man, though he is content to have an aura of cigar-smoke rather than unctuous religiosity around his face. Those who have read his books know that Churchill, like Chiang Kai-Shek and Gandhi, is a firm believer in the guidance of Providence, even if he may not

1. *Beggar My Neighbour* p. 55 2. *Ibid*, p. 57

consciously seek it every day like these two. And though Churchill's life has been spent mostly in the hurly-burly of politics and the din and the slaughter of war, he has an abiding faith in moral rather than physical force.

Forty-three years ago, in one of his earliest speeches in the House of Commons, he had declared: "There is a moral force which, as the human race advances, will more and more strengthen and protect those nations who enjoy it.....And we shall make a fatal bargain if we allow the moral force which this country has so long exerted to become diminished, or perhaps destroyed, for the sake of costly, trumpery, dangerous military playthings."

Young Churchill here gave expression to a sentiment which old Gandhi may feel proud to echo. But the trouble with Churchill has been that he has always mixed up this moral force with the British Empire! In the same speech, between the two sentences quoted above, he observed: "It is known, alike by peoples and rulers, that upon the whole, and it is upon the whole that we must judge these things, British influence, is a healthy and kindly influence, and makes for the general happiness and welfare of mankind."

Gandhi's entire thesis, the very teaching of his life, is that it is nothing of that kind; that, on the contrary, it is destroying a nation of 400 million people physically, smothering it spiritually; that for our national regeneration better would be anarchy under God than peace under the Union Jack! This conclusion did not come as a sudden revelation to Gandhi, but was rubbed in upon him daily and hourly during twenty years of loyalty to the British Empire, a loyalty which even a Churchill would envy. That is the reason why Gandhi, who was a voluntary stretcher-bearer in the Boer War and an honorary recruiting campaigner in World War I, has refused to give even moral support to the British Empire in World War II!

Churchill has never bothered to understand this transition of Gandhi, and, with Gandhi, of hundreds of millions of Indians. He is not even able to comprehend that the same impulses which made the Britishers struggle for their *Magna Carta*, or the Americans to fight for their independence may be at work in the breast of Indians. He believes that the revolutionary processes of history do not—at least should not—operate east of Suez, and that the Indian masses should be grateful for the dispensation of Providence which has put them under the protection of Britain. Churchill has no patience with professional agitators and half-naked fakirs. The ancient Athenians found it easier to make Socrates drink a cup of hemlock than to argue with him. The present British Government under Churchill has found it easier to crush Gandhi-ism than to parley with Gandhi.

Gandhi-ism is crushed. Gandhi is gagged. Yet even in his detention he remains "a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body which you can always conquer, gives you so little purchase over his soul." And so though you can dispense with a judicial trial as far as Gandhi himself is concerned, you must do a little judicious propaganda to convince the world—perhaps your own conscience—that Gandhi-ism had to be crushed to make India safe for the war. And on this subject let Lionel Fielden, who ought to know something about propaganda with his long connection with the B. B. C. and A. I. R., speak again:

"British propaganda has scarcely, during this war, come up to British standards of fairplay. Gandhi has been deliberately represented as being—and is so imagined by millions of decent English folk—anti-British, pro-Jap, the main if not the only wrecker of the Cripps proposals, a saboteur, a deliberate instigator of violence, a defeatist. I suppose that Pilate, had he possessed the advantages of press and wireless, might have thought up similar lines."[1]

1 *Ibid*, p. 58

Let us return to that meeting between Gandhi and Churchill—the meeting which did not take place in 1931. I have always toyed with the wishful thought of such a meeting between Prime Minister Churchill and his prisoner in the Aga Khan's Palace in Poona. There is a school of historians which holds that the history of the world would have changed had Cleopatra's nose been a little longer. I do not follow this school; much less do I hold that the course of Indo-British relations would have indubitably changed, had such a meeting taken place.

But there was a sporting chance—more than a sporting chance—that the basis of an Indo-British understanding would have been arrived at during a heart-to-heart talk between Churchill and Gandhi, might be arrived at even now. At any rate a Churchill-Gandhi meeting would become as historic as the meeting between Alexander and Diogenes. One day the King of Macedon presented himself before the famous cynic and said, "I am Alexander." "Well," replied the master of the tub, "and I am Diogenes." Alexander was slightly taken aback by the response but, assuming his most affable manner, asked the philosopher if he could render him any service. Pat came the retort, "Yes; get out of my sun."

Now Gandhi has already asked Britain to quit India, to get out of his sun, but I am sure he would welcome Churchill with open arms. He would put him instantly and completely at ease. He would shield him from the Indian sun. Probably he would not talk politics at all but discuss Churchill's well-known hobbies, bricklaying and painting. For Gandhi, too, is nuts on his hobbies. Then perhaps they would swap reminiscences of Charlie Chaplin (*Who is Chaplin?*—asked Gandhi when the former expressed a desire to see him!) and Jan Christian Smuts, for whom Gandhi had sewed a pair of sandals with his own

hands when he was *his* prisoner in South Africa. Churchill would tell with a chuckle how Louis Botha caught him in the Boer War and how he gave a slip to his captors one night.

And so the conversation would flow on and Churchill would talk of his anxiety to win the war as early as possible—to gain the last and greatest victory of his life. "That is my sole aim and ambition in my life, Mr. Gandhi, as I said in my very first speech in Parliament after becoming the Prime Minister." Gandhi would say he cares more for truth than for victory or for anything else. Truth and non-violence. Personally he had confessed to Himalayan blunders and voluntarily accepted grievous failures in the pursuit of truth. He would quote the ancient Sanskrit saying that there is no greater religion in the world than truth, though in the history of the world

Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong for ever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

"Truth is the only victory I care for, Mr. Churchill," Gandhi would say warming up to his theme. "I care for no other triumph but the triumph of truth." Did not St. Augustine write long ago: "Victories come bloody, deadly vain if men set out to be conquerors of the world, when in reality they are the slaves of vice; when if they conquer, they betray themselves; regarding victory as an end in itself."

"Was not that conclusion borne irresistibly upon you, Mr. Churchill, during the uneasy era between the two world wars? Did you not yourself write, as you contemplated

in tranquillity the lessons of World War I that 'the shadow of victory is disillusion?'[1] Is not a greater disillusion in store for the world when once again you emerge victorious out of the present Armageddon—unless you have assured yourself that your victory is not the victory only of might but also of right.

"Beware, Mr. Churchill, of slipping once again into 'the rough, dark, sour and chilly waters' from which you have extricated the western world with such superhuman efforts. Beware, lest the waters finally close over the heads of the victors as well as the vanquished."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GRAND UPHOLDER

"Is there any other country in the world which would tamely submit to be pushed out of its rights and duties in the East? Would France be chattered out of Indo-China? Would Italy relinquish her North African possessions? Would the Dutch give up Java to please the Japanese? Would the United States be hustled out of the Philippines? All these countries assert themselves, and insist that their rights and wishes in their own sphere shall be respected. We alone seem afraid of our own shadow."[2]

—CHURCHILL

ODD as it may appear, all these seemingly impossible things have come to pass. All the hypothetical questions raised by Churchill have been answered in the affirmative by the muse of history. The moving finger has written and moved

1 *Great Contemporaries* p. 288

2 Speech in Liverpool, March 5,1931

on. Only the echo of Churchill's rhetoric mocks in our ears, and before our eyes unfolds the incongruous spectacle of Churchill holding what he has and even what he has not, like a greedy miser clutching desperately to his money-bags, unmindful of the rents in their bottom.

A large chunk of the British Empire has been knocked away along with Indo-China, Java and the Philippines, not to talk of the Italian possessions in Africa. It is Japan who is now the mistress of the European colonies in the East. France, Holland and Italy themselves became parts of the Nazi Empire.

The whole world is in the melting pot. Only India remains where she was—in the year 1858! That year the British Crown took over the responsibility of governing India from the East India Company following the rebellion of 1857. It is true that in five provinces, the 1935 version of provincial autonomy exists still but there, too, behind the parade of constitutional rule, the power of the British Governors is supreme, two of them having dismissed their Prime Ministers and the third one a Minister, without so much as a reference to the Legislatures to which they were responsible.

The successive constitutional reforms by which Britain sought (in the words of the 1917 declaration) to develop self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India, have been swept away. Even the reign of law has been subordinated to the expediency of the Defence of India Rules. Every action of ours except inhaling God's good air is governed by regulations and ordinances.

It may be admitted that the abrogation of civil liberties is a normal war-time practice in all belligerent countries. But there is nothing normal in the situation obtaining in India at present. India is the most outstanding abnormality

of World War II. She is living simultaneously in the 19th and 20th centuries. We can understand the situation of Poland, for whose liberation Britain ostensibly drew her sword. We can understand the position of France, whose own Fascist elements betrayed her. We can even understand the position of the Philippines to whom the United States has given her solemn word—not vague promises of freedom for the future, but a bond which will automatically mature in 1946.

Nobody can understand, however, the situation in India in the context of World War II. It is because "the issue of India is more than the issue of India; it is the issue of freedom and what we intend to do with it. Because we will not even face the issue of empire versus freedom, we have come to the perfectly anomalous position which bothers anybody but an Englishman, that in this war of freedom the Indian fighters are in jail for committing the crime of fighting for freedom."[1]

Least of all does the anomaly bother Churchill. He will tell you, in the first place, that it is not the British but the Indians who are responsible for their present plight—*vide* Amery's declaration of August 1940, amplified and revised by the Cripps offer of 1942, and further rubbed in by numerous Viceregal pronouncements. The jam of freedom, he will repeat, is theirs for the asking tomorrow, if only they will behave like good boys and fight the Japs today. Secondly, he will remind you in connection with the present undiluted autocracy in India what he said in London as long ago as December 12, 1930:

"We (have) reserved to ourselves an (equal) right to restrict, delay, or, if need be, for a spell to reverse that process (of constitutional development). So far as there exists any contract between a people conquered by force in

1 Lin Yutang *Between Tears and Laughter*

former times and the modern Parliament of a benevolent nation, vowed to promote their welfare, that is the contract and nothing more."

More pertinent still to the present situation is the following extract from a speech he delivered in Manchester on January 30, 1931 : "Instead of proclaiming that our object is to wind up our affairs and hand over the Government of India to the tiny oligarchy of Indian politicians who have raised this agitation, we ought to begin now by making it perfectly clear that we intend to remain the effective rulers of India in every essential for a very long and indefinite period, and though we welcome co-operation in every branch of government from loyal and faithful Indians, we will have no truck with lawlessness or treason, and will, if necessary, suspend even the moderate constitutional changes, while there is bad spirit abroad."

Firmly and prophetically said ! The formula seems to have been prepared in 1931 specifically for the situation that was to confront Churchill when he came to power in 1940 !

Thirdly, Churchill does not really understand what all this international pother about India means. He honestly believes that India is a domestic problem of Britain—a problem that is to be solved by Britain for India. "The British government is convinced," he informed the House of Commons on March 17, 1943, "that the administration of British colonies must continue to be the sole responsibility of Great Britain." And when the Labourite Mr. McGovern asked whether this meant that "Britain does not intend to give up its occupied territories at the end of the war, as well as Germany," Churchill retorted, "that would be a very insulting parallel to draw."

Churchill sees nothing funny or sinister in the word Empire or Imperialism. On the contrary, he considers the British Empire a happy family, the first successful

attempt in history to form a commonwealth of nations, which, instead of being derided, ought to serve as the model for the bigger commonwealth of the world. The Empire Prime Ministers' Conference, which was held in London in May 1944, and at which two Indian "representatives" chaperoned by Amery were present, gave a timely demonstration to the world of the unity of the Empire.

Hands off the Empire!—This is the notice served upon the world by Churchill. When Dr. Wellington Koo broached the question of Indian freedom with Churchill, the latter is reported to have told him that if the Chinese Government did not stop intervening in the matter, British-Chinese relations would be seriously endangered! Even upon his senior partner in Washington, Churchill has pressed, politely but consistently and firmly, the same policy of non-interference in Indian affairs. It is true that after the first terrific impact of the Japanese war, Roosevelt sent Col. Louis Johnson as his personal emissary to India, who took a prominent part in the Cripps-Congress negotiations. It was soon obvious, however, that even this friendly intervention was not relished.

Subsequently when, in the autumn of 1942, the American President placed an army bomber at the disposal of Wendell Willkie and asked him to go round the world, he expressly put India out of bounds for purposes of the itinerary. India presumably was not part of Willkie's *One World!* It was what is called in diplomatic language Britain's exclusive sphere of influence. It was not on the map, as far as the other nations were concerned.

Nevertheless, later on, Roosevelt sent to India another personal emissary—the poker-faced, professional diplomat, William Phillips, to study the situation at first hand on his behalf. Studying India without meeting the Mahatma was, however, like staging Hamlet without the Prince of Den-

mark. And when the daring Ambassador made a request to be allowed to meet His Majesty's prisoner, it was promptly and unceremoniously turned down. Since then rather than risk any such indignities, Roosevelt has dropped the sizzling hot Indian potato altogether!

"It's no use rubbing Winston the wrong way!"—he must have thought. "Anyway, he has made India a safe strategic base for us to fight the Japs from. It's my own fault really. I ought to have realised what a blind-spot India is with him when he peremptorily excluded her from the operation of the Atlantic Charter, even before the ink of the Charter was dry, without so much as a reference to me—its co-and-senior -author. That was in 1941, when we were not in the war. I dare not publicly protest against Churchill's policy then: much less can I do so now when our fortunes are so bound up together. There will always be skeletons in the cupboard, after all."

China was snubbed. America was silenced. Russia is too busy fighting Germany to interest herself in India. The voice of India lies stifled and still. It is only a handful of international intellectuals like Louis Fischer, Lin Yutang and Harold Laski, who keep on criticising Britain's approach to India and harping upon her importance in the morality of war and in the formulation of peace. The American publicist, Louis Fischer, has voluntarily constituted himself a propagandist of Indian freedom in America, though his writings are not allowed to fan the flames of unrest in India.

The Chinese philosopher, Lin Yutang, has severely castigated Churchill's handling of the problem of India in his book, *Between Tears And Laughter*. The British professor, Harold Laski, considers that "to have India as a willing partner in the great enterprise upon which we are engaged would be one of the supreme victories of the war." Fortunately for Churchill, all such criticism runs over him like

water over a duck's back. It moves him neither to tears nor to laughter, but to sheer boredom. He has always entertained a healthy contempt for intellectuals, who have a number of bees always buzzing in their bonnets, and plenty of leisure on their hands. Academic criticism cuts no ice with a man of action like Churchill.

It is all right to talk and write of granting freedom to India in order to win the greatest victory in the war for Democracy, and to indulge in similar tommy rot about this and that. But coming to brasstacks, without India, where would Britain be ? "The loss of India would mark and consummate the downfall of the British Empire. That great organism would pass at a stroke out of life into history."[1] Churchill has stressed this fundamental fact again and again.

"The loss of India however arising, would be final and fatal to us. It could not fail to be part of a process which would reduce us to the scale of a minor power.....If, guided by counsels of madness and cowardice disguised as false benevolence, you troop home from India.....you will find famine to greet you on the horizon on your return."[2] What can Churchill do then, save hold what he has ? Even the fire-eating socialist, Emmanuel Shinwell, came to the same conclusion when he made an "objective" study of the situation !

Howsoever anomalous and anachronistic Churchill's present position may be, we must at least admit that he has never sailed under false colours or resorted to cant or hypocrisy. Whether he was a Tory or a Liberal, he has always remained a full-blooded Imperialist. His biographers call him, variously, a great Elizabethan, a great buccaneer, a great Englishman, but nobody suggests—not even he himself—that he is a great democrat, or a great internationalist.

1 *Supra* p. 71 2 *Supra* p. 72

One of his biographers, R. Sencourt, remarks that "All his life Churchill has been engaged against three evils: the one is nationalism; the other socialism; the third is democratic control of the economic system and foreign affairs."[1]

Now this seems to be rather an exaggerated statement for the simple reason that Churchill has ideologically been floundering all his life. He is a Whig aristocrat of the eighteenth century, born and bred up in the nineteenth, whose life work has lain in the twentieth! His ideas thus cut across three centuries and involve him in endless contradictions and anomalies. During the period between the two world wars, he was gradually losing his faith in democracy and had actually started flirting with Fascists, if not Fascism. It was only when Fascism presented itself as a challenge to Imperialism, to the security and greatness of the British Empire, that he finally ranged himself against it.

What are then the motive-springs of Churchill's career? In October 1940, when formally accepting the leadership of the Conservative Party, Churchill said:

"My life, such as it has been, has been lived for forty years in the public eye, and very varying opinions are entertained about it—and about particular phases in it. I shall attempt no justification, but this I will venture most humbly to submit and also to declare, because it springs most deeply from the convictions of my heart, that at all times according to my lights, and throughout the changing scenes through which we are all hurried, I have always faithfully served two public causes which I think stand supreme—the maintenance of the enduring greatness of Britain and her Empire, and the historic continuity of our island life."

Note that this pronouncement was made in October 1940, when Germany and Russia were still friends, America

1 R. Sencourt *Winston Churchill* p. 293

was a neutral nation and Britain stood alone facing Nazi Germany at the zenith of her power. Even then the cause which was uppermost in Churchill's mind was not the destruction of Fascism, but the maintenance of the enduring greatness of Britain *and her Empire*, not the freedom of humanity, but " the historic continuity of our island life."

At various other times Churchill has declared that he is fighting for victory, for survival, for Christian civilization, but never once has he wholeheartedly stated that he is fighting for a new order which will end the exploitation of one man by another, or of one nation by another nation. He has occasionally paid lip tributes to the Atlantic Charter or to Roosevelt's " Four Freedoms ", but with this mental reservation tnat nothing would be allowed to detract from the enduring greatness of Britain *and her Empire*. In the words of Lin Yutang, " Churchill is fighting a twentieth-century war in order to take off his boots after the war and climb back into a nineteenth-century bed comfortably mattressed in India, Singapore and Hong-Kong."

Churchill bluntly declared in the House of Commons, while replying to a recommendation made by a Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives, " that there is not the slightest question of any cession of British territories, not the slightest." Even so, in the generous flush of victory he may be persuaded to hand over Hong-Kong to China : in Chinese eyes Hong-Kong is not merely a major port but a major point of prestige. Even Singapore may become a joint Anglo-American base. But Churchill would stay put in India for all time, if only he could. For without India, there is no British Empire. Without India, Britain would be reduced to a third-rate power. Without India " that great organism would pass at a stroke out of life into history." Without India, victory will be barren; the war will be a delusion.

India has always been the classical case of Imperialistic exploitation, as Karl Marx pointed out long ago. But now it has also become the classical case of the war aims not only of Britain, but of all the Allies, Russia not excluded. The two-score United Nations are not fighting the war to enable Churchill to climb back into his Indian bed, or de Gaulle into his Indo-Chinese, or Queen Wilhemina into her Javanese four-poster either. India is the crux of the war, the key to the whole colonial problem, the touchstone of Allied morality.

"Many men and women I have talked with from Africa to Alaska," wrote Wendell Willkie after his global tour, "asked me the question which has become almost a symbol all through Asia: *What about India?*.....From Cairo on it confronted me at every turn. The wisest man in China said to me: 'When the aspiration of India for freedom was put aside to some future date, it was not Great Britain that suffered in public esteem in the Far East. It was the United States.'

"The wise man was not quarrelling with British Imperialism in India.....He was telling me that by our silence on India we have already drawn heavily on our reservoir of goodwill in the East. People of the East who would like to count on us are doubtful. They cannot ascertain from our attitude towards the problem of India what we are likely to feel at the end of the war about all the other hundreds of million of eastern people. They cannot tell from our vague and vacillating talk whether or not we really do stand for freedom or what we mean by freedom."[1]

Since these words were written, there has been, at any rate, nothing vague and vacillating about Churchill's talk. For two years successively he has declared from the Mansion House-top that he will hold what he has. In Parlia-

1 *One World* p. 151

ment he takes every possible opportunity to stress that he will neither cede British territories nor even allow any outside interference in their administration. Not outside—not even inside!

Every such announcement takes off the ideological gilt from the war's stale gingerbread. It disillusions and infuriates the people in the East who thus find that all those years they have been sacrificing their money and life only for tightening their own shackles ultimately. They have no use for Churchill's "Imperial Democracy." In their ears it sounds as spurious a coin as Hitler's National Socialism. It is not a war-cry of emancipation, but a peace-cry of exploitation. Churchill first used the phrase "Imperial Democracy of England" as a young subaltern writing his first book in Bangalore.

Forty-seven long and fateful years have passed since then. Two great wars and a score of minor ones have been waged. Ancient dynasties have been swept away; empires have crashed into dust. Man has soared spiritually as well as physically into the high heavens. The world has visibly contracted, while our social vision has expanded. But all through those years of storm and stress, Churchill has not progressed ideologically in the least. Even in the present conflagration he stands like Casabianca on the burning deck clutching the tattered flag of Imperial Democracy bequeathed to him by his father, while beneath his feet the ship of Imperialism is sinking.

There is a basic conflict in the war-aims of Churchill and of the billions of so-called backward people of the world. In the British Empire itself the proportion of white to coloured people is one to six. Churchill does not speak even for that one white person, for the Dominions, with the exception of South Africa, do not want to be partners in colonial exploitation.

Mr. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, has officially stated that he was not enamoured of the proposal that the British Empire should form a solid group of nations—the proposal "to refloat the sunken ship of Imperialism" as a Canadian M. P. caustically described it. Mr. King wanted close collaboration not only inside the British Commonwealth but amongst all nations, great and small, seeking peace.

Even intrinsically there is nothing in the grand manner, nothing heroic or inspiring about Churchill's Imperialism. "An Imperialist used to be an adventurous young fellow, seeking new fields to conquer and setting out to paint the world red. Now he is a timid landlord dreading change, determined that the world shall remain as far as possible exactly as it is today and repeating querulously over and over again *What We Have We Hold.* Imperialism used to be a matter of hitting out. Now it is a matter of sitting tight. Imperialists once sang about the Empire with a certain gay exuberance, 'wider still and wider shall the bounds be set!' Now they merely mutter, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted!'" [1]

But it is not merely an anachronistic or quixotic or slightly comic sight which Churchill presents when he rises to give his annual performance in the Mansion House. This great war leader of the United Nations throws an ominous shadow on the peace that is to follow the war. The war he is waging is not the war which Stalin and Chiang Kai-Shek are waging, not the war Roosevelt is waging, though adversity has made strange bed-fellows of them all. It is not the war which Nehru would have liked to wage. It is not even the war that history has staged.

"Churchill fights Hitler as Marlborough fought Louis XIV, as Pitt fought Napoleon. The immense social forces

1 From an article in "The Town And Country Review", organ of the Common Wealth Party.

which have gone to make this war are as outside his consciousness as the principles of the Russian revolution are outside his understanding. He is not really interested in a post-war world in which the foundations are revised."[1]

Not only is he not interested, but he is actually determined to prevent their revision—at any rate as far as the British Empire is concerned. That is why I said above that he casts an ominous shadow over the peace that is to follow the war. After victory, he may redraw the world's map exactly as it was—except where the frontiers of Russia are concerned! He may move back into Burma, Malaya and Hong-Kong. But he cannot fix the old frontiers for freedom. He cannot say that democracy will advance thus far and no further.

"Men and women all over the world are on the march, physically, intellectually and spiritually. After centuries of ignorant and dull compliance, hundreds of millions of people in Eastern Europe and Asia have opened the books. Old fears no longer frighten them. They are no longer willing to be eastern slaves for western profits. They are beginning to know that men's welfare throughout the world is inter-dependent. They are resolved that there is no more place for Imperialism within their own society than in the Society of Nations."[2]

No amount of cajoling, casuistry, coercion, or Cripps is going to silence or stop those people. They are determined that they shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall be established at long last all over the world. The 400 million people of India and their neighbours in Burma and Malaya will not for long allow themselves to be held by Churchill. If holding those people like so many heads of

1 Harold Laski in *Nation*, December 18, 1943
2 Wendell Willkie *One World* p. 167

dumb, driven cattle is one of the war-aims of Churchill, then even if he wins the war, he will, as surely as anything is sure in this world, lose the peace.

No victories in the field will be able to win that peace. It is only by a new approach to the problem of Empire and of colonies, of colour and creed, that real peace can be established in this world. And that is not the approach of the buccaneer, the *banya* or the bureaucrat, nor even of the white Christian missionaries towards the black and brown and yellow heathens in Africa and Asia and Australasia. What the world badly needs today is the brotherhood of man without the fatherhood of the white demigod.

Unless Churchill opens his mind to the new spiritual impulses and social forces which motivate humanity at present, unless he persuades himself to give up in good time and with good grace what does not belong to him, unless he renders unto the people of India and the rest of the Empire the lands and liberties which are theirs, he will find that he will have ushered only another armistice after the end of the present Armageddon. The aftermath of World War II is bound to be far more bitter and bloody than that of World War I, for the simple reason that the politico-economic ferment which convulsed Europe then has already spread all over the world now. Out of the very frustration of the people of the East may be born a Frankenstein's monster who may devour the West as well as the East.

The responsibility of preventing this terrible aftermath rests primarily upon Churchill. For it is he who alone among the Allied leaders has come out so unabashedly for holding what he has. Churchill called Lenin the Grand Repudiator. He himself will probably go down in history as the GRAND UPHOLDER.

He upholds everything; God, King and Country; Union Jack and *Rule Britannia*; the three estates of the realm

and the exact size and shape of the House of Commons ; the stately homes of England and the capitalistic disorder of English society. And, of course, he upholds the British Empire and, above all, India, that most truly bright and precious gem in the crown of the King. Let him beware, however, of upholding in the name of a benevolent Imperialism what he has so valiantly sought to destroy all those years—the spirit of Fascism !

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